THE

EARTHLY PARADISE

A POEM.

WILLIAM MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

POPULAR EDITION.

IN TEN PARTS.

PART VII.

THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN.

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THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN.

ARGUMENT.

This story shows how two friends loved a fair woman, and how he who loved her best had her to wife, though she loved him little or not at all, and how one of these two friends gave shame to and received death of the other, who in his turn came to his end by reason of that deed

Of Herdholt and Bathstead.

HERDHOLT my tale names for the stead, where erst
Olaf the Peacock dwelt, nowise the worst
Among the great men of a noble day:
Upon a knoll amidst a vale it lay,
Nigh where Laxriver meets the western sea,
And in that day it nourished plenteously
Great wealth of sheep and cattle.

Ye shall know
That Olaf to a mighty house did go
To take to him a wife: Thorgerd he gat,
The daughter of the man, at Burg who sat,
After a great life, with eyes waxing dim,
Egil, the mighty son of Skallagrim.

Now of the sons the twain had, first we name
Kiartan alone, for eld's sake and for fame,
Then Steinthor, Haldor, Helgi, and Hauskuld,
All of good promise, strong and lithe and bold,
Yet little against Kiartan's glory weighed;
Besides these props the Peacock's house that stayed,
Two maidens, Thurid, Thorbiorg there were;
And furthermore a youth was fostered there,
Whom Thorleik, Olaf's brother, called his son:
Bodli his name was. Thus the tale is done
Of those who dwelt at Herdholt in those days.

Midst the grey slopes, Bathstead its roof did raise
Seven miles from Herdholt; Oswif, wise of men,
Who Thordis had to wife, abode there then
With his five sons, of whom let names go past
That are but names; but these were first and last,
Ospak and Thorolf: never, says my tale,
That Oswif's wisdom was of much avail
In making these, though they were stout enow;
But in his house a daughter did there grow
To perfect womanhood, Gudrun by name,
Whose birth the wondering world no more might blame
Than her's who erst called Tyndarus her sire,
What hearts soe'er, what roof-trees she might fire,
What hearts soe'er, what hearths she might leave cold,
Before the ending of the tale be told.

But where we take the story up, fifteen
The maiden's years were; Kiartan now had seen

His eighteenth spring, and younger by a year
Was Bodli, son of Thorleik.

Now most fair
Seemed Olaf's lot in life, and scarcely worse
Was Oswif's, and what shadow of a curse
Might hang o'er either house, was thought of now
As men think of a cloud the mountain's brow
Hides from their eyes an hour before the rain,
For so much love there was betwixt the twain,
Herdholt and Bathstead, that it well might last
Until the folk aforenamed were all passed
From out the world; but herein shall be shown
How the sky blackened, and the storm swept down

The Prophecy of Guest the Wise.

UPON a day, amid the maids that spun
Within the bower at Bathstead, sat Gudrun,
Her father in the firth a fishing was,
The while her mother through the meads did pass
About some homely work So there she sat,
Nor set her hand to this work or to that,
And a half-frown was on her pensive face,
Nor did she heed the chatter of the place
As girl spake unto girl. Then did she hear
The sound of horse-hoofs swiftly drawing near,
And started up, and cried, "That shall be Guest,
Riding, as still his wont is, from the west

Unto the Thing, and this is just the day
When he is wont at Bathstead to make stay."
  Then to the door she went, and with slim hand
Put it aback, and 'twixt the posts did stand,
And saw therewith a goodly company
Ride up the grey slopes leading from the sea.

  That spring was she just come to her full height;
Low-bosomed yet she was, and slim and light,
Yet scarce might she grow fairer from that day,
Gold were the locks wherewith the wind did play,
Finer than silk, waved softly like the sea
After a three days' calm, and to her knee
Well-nigh they reached; fair were the white hands laid
Upon the door-posts where the dragons played;
Her brow was smooth now, and a smile began
To cross her delicate mouth, the snare of man;
For some thought rose within the heart of her
That made her eyes bright, her cheeks ruddier
Than was their wont, yet were they delicate
As are the changing steps of high heaven's gate;
Bluer than grey her eyes were; somewhat thin
Her marvellous red lips; round was her chin,
Cloven, and clear-wrought; like an ivory tower
Rose up her neck from love's white-veiled bower.
  But in such lordly raiment was she clad,
As midst its threads the scent of southlands had,
And on its hem the work of such-like hands

As deal with silk and gold in sunny lands.
Too dainty seemed her feet to come anear
The guest-worn threshold-stone. So stood she there,
And rough the world about her seemed to be,
A rude heap cast up from the weary sea.

But now the new-come folk, some twelve in all,
Drew rein before the doorway of the hall,
And she a step or two across the grass
Unto the leader of the men did pass,
A white-haired elder clad in kirtle red :
" Be welcome here, O Guest the Wise !" she said,
" My father honours me so much that I
Am bid to pray thee not to pass us by,
But bide here for a while ; he says withal
That thou and he together in the hall
Are two wise men together, two who can
Talk cunningly about the ways of man."

Guest laughed, and leapt from off his horse, and
said :
" Fair words from fair lips, and a goodly stead,
But unto Thickwood must I go to-night
To give my kinsman Armod some delight ;
Nevertheless here will we rest a while,
And thou and I with talk an hour beguile,
For so it is that all men say of thee,
'Not far off falls the apple from the tree,'
That 'neath thy coif some day shall lie again

When he is dead, the wise old Oswif's brain."
With that he took her hand, and to the hall
She led him, and his fellows one and all
Leapt to the ground, and followed clattering
In through the porch, and many a goodly thing
There had they plenteously; but mid the noise
And rattling horns and laughter, with clear voice
Spake Gudrun unto Guest, and ever he
Smiled at her goodly sayings joyfully,
And yet at whiles grew grave; yea, and she too,
Though her eyes glistened, seemed as scarce she knew
The things she said. At last, amid their speech,
The old man stayed his hand as it did reach
Out to the beaker, and his grey eyes stared
As though unseen things to his soul were bared;
Then Gudrun waited trembling, till he said:

"Liest thou awake at midnight in thy bed,
Thinking of dreams dreamed in the winter-tide,
When the north-east, turned off the mountain-side,
Shook the stout timbers of the hall, as when
They shook in Norway ere the upland men
Bore axe against them?"
She spake low to him:
"So is it, but of these the most wax dim
When daylight comes again; but four there are—
Four dreams in one—that bring me yet great care,
Nor may I soon forget them, yea, they sink
Still deeper in my soul—but do thou drink,

And tell me merry tales; of what avail
To speak of things that make a maiden pale
And a man laugh?"
"Speak quick," he said, "before
This glimmer of a sight I have is o'er."

Then she delayed not, but in quick words said:
"Methought that with a coif upon my head
I stood upon a stream-side, and withal
Upon my heart the sudden thought did fall
How foul that coif was, and how ill it sat,
And though the folk beside me spoke 'gainst that,
Nevertheless, from off mine head I tore
The cursed thing, and cast it from the shore;
And glad at heart was I when it was gone,
And woke up laughing."
"Well, the second one,"
Said Guest; "Make good speed now, and tell me all!"

"This was the dream," she said, "that next did fall:
By a great water was I; on mine arm
A silver ring, that more my heart did charm
Than one might deem that such a small thing might;
My very own indeed seemed that delight,
And long I looked to have it; but as I
Stood and caressed the dear thing, suddenly
It slipped from off my arm, and straightway fell
Into the water: nor is more to tell

But that I wept thereat, and sorrowed sore
As for a friend that I should see no more."

"As great," said Guest, "is this thing as the last,
What follows after?"
"O'er the road I passed
Nigh Bathstead," said she, "in fair raiment clad,
And on mine arm a golden ring I had;
And seemly did I deem it, yet the love
I had therefor was not so much above
That wherewithal I loved the silver ring,
As gold is held by all a dearer thing
Than silver is; now, whatso worth it bore,
Methought that needs for longer than before
This ring should give me what it might of bliss;
But even as with foolish dreams it is
So was it now; falling I seemed to be,
And spread my arms abroad to steady me;
Upon a stone the ring smote, and atwain
It broke; and when I stooped the halves to gain,
Lo, blood ran out from either broken place;
Then as I gazed thereon I seemed to trace
A flaw within the craftsman's work, whereby
The fair thing brake; yea, withal presently
Yet other flaws therein could I discern;
And as I stood and looked, and sore did yearn,
Midst blind regrets, rather than raging pain,
For that fair thing I should not see again,
My eyes seemed opened, to my heart it came,

Spite of those flaws, that on me lay the blame
Why thus was spoiled that noble gift and rare,
Because therewith I dealt not with due care:
So with a sigh I woke."

"Ill fare," said Guest,
"Three of thy dreams, tell now about the rest."

"This is the last of the four dreams," she said;
"Methought I had a helm upon my head,
Wrought all of gold, with precious gems beset,
And pride and joy I had therein, and yet,
So heavy was it, that I scarce might hold
My head upright for that great weight of gold;
Yet for all that I laid no blame or wrong
Upon it, and I fain had kept it long;
But amid this, while least I looked therefor,
Something, I knew not what, the fair helm tore
From off mine head, and then I saw it swept
Into the firth, and when I would have wept
Then my voice failed me, and mine eyes were dry
Despite my heart; and therewith presently
I woke, and heard withal the neat-herd's song
As o'er the hard white snow he went along
Unto the byre, shouldering his load of hay;
Then knew I the beginning of the day,
And to the window went and saw afar
The wide firth, black beneath the morning-star,
And all the waste of snow, and saw the man
Dark on the slope; 'twixt the dead earth and wan,

And the dark vault of star-besprinkled sky,
Croaking, a raven toward the sea did fly.—
—With that I fell a yearning for the spring,
And all the pleasant things that it should bring,
And lay back in my bed and shut my eyes,
To see what pictures to my heart would rise,
And slept, but dreamed no more; now spring is here—
Thou know'st perchance, made wise with many a year,
What thing it is I long for; but to me
All grows as misty as the autumn sea
'Neath the first hoar-frost, and I name it not,
The thing wherewith my wondering heart is hot."

Then Guest turned round upon her, with a smile
Beholding her fair face a little while,
And as he looked on her she hid her eyes
With slim hands, but he saw the bright flush rise,
Despite of them, up to her forehead fair;
Therewith he sighed as one who needs must bear
A heavy burden.
"Since thou thus hast told
Thy dreams," he said, "scarce may I now withhold
The tale of what mine eyes have seen therein;
Yet little from my foresight shalt thou win,
Since both the blind, and they who see full well,
Go the same road, and leave a tale to tell
Of interwoven miseries, lest they,
Who after them a while on earth must stay,
Should have no pleasure in the winter night,

When this man's pain is made that man's delight."

He smiled an old man's smile, as thus he spake,
Then said, "But I must hasten ere it break
The thin sharp thread of light that yet I see—
—Methinks a stirring life shall hap to thee.
Thou shalt be loved and love; wrongs shalt thou give,
Wrongs shalt thou take, and therewithal outlive
Both wrongs, and love, and joy, and dwell alone
When all the fellows of thy life are gone.
Nay, think not I can tell thee much of this,
How it shall hap, the sorrow or the bliss
Only foreshadowing of outward things,
Great, and yet not the greatest, dream-lore brings.

"For whereas of the ill coif thou didst dream,
That such a husband unto me doth seem
As thou shalt think mates thee but ill enow,
Nor shall love-longings bind thee; so shalt thou
By thine own deed shake off this man from thee.

"But next the ring of silver seems to me,
Another husband, loved and loving well;
But even as the ring from off thee fell
Into the water, so it is with him,
The sea shall make his love and promise dim.

"But for the gold ring; thou shalt wed again,

A worthier man belike—yet well-nigh vain
My strivings are to see what means the gold
Thou lovedst not more than silver: I am old
And thou art very young; hadst thou my sight,
Perchance herein thou wouldst have more of might.
But my heart says, that on the land there comes
A faith that telleth of more lovesome homes
For dead men, than we deemed of heretofore,
And that this man full well shall know that lore.
But whereas blood from out the ring did run,
By the sword's edge his life shall be foredone:
Then for the flaws—see thou thyself to these!
Thou knowest how a thing full well may please,
When first thou hast it in thine hold, until
Up to the surface float the seeds of ill,
And vain regret o'er all thy life is spread.

"But for the heavy helm that bowed thine head—
This, thy last husband, a great chief shall be,
And hold a helm of terror over thee
Though thou shalt love him: at the end of life
His few last minutes shall he spend in strife
With the wild waves of Hwammfirth, and in vain,
For him too shall the white sea-goddess gain.

"So is thy dream areded; but these things
Shall hang above thee, as on unheard wings
The kestrel hangs above the mouse; nor more
As erst I said shalt thou gain by my lore

Than at the end of life, perchance, a smile
That fate with sight and blindness did beguile
Thine eyes in such sort—that thou knewst the end,
But not the way whereon thy feet did wend
On any day amid the many years,
Wherethrough thou waitedst for the flood of tears,
The dreariness that at some halting-place,
Waited in turn to change thy smiling face.
Be merry yet! these things shall not be all
That unto thee in this thy life shall fall."

Amid these latter words of his, the may
From her fair face had drawn her hands away,
And sat there with fixed eyes, and face grown pale,
As one who sees the corner of the veil,
That hideth strange things, lifted for a while;
But when he ceased, she said with a faint smile
And trembling lips:
"Thanked be thou; well it is!
From thee I get no promise of vain bliss,
And constant joy; a tale I might have had
From flattering lips to make my young heart glad—
Yea, have my thanks!—yet wise as thou mayst be,
Mayst thou not dimly through these tangles see?"

He answered nought, but sat awhile with eyes
Distraught and sad, and face made over wise
With many a hard vain struggle; but at last
As one who from him a great weight doth cast,
He rose and spake to her:

"Wild words, fair may,
Now time it is that we were on our way."
Then unto him her visage did she turn
In either cheek a bright red spot did burn,
Her teeth were set hard, and her brow was knit
As though she saw her life and strove with it.
Yet presently but common words she spake,
And bid him bide yet for her father's sake,
To make him joyful when the boards were laid;
But certainly, whatever words she said.
She heeded little, only from her tongue
By use and wont clear in his ears they rung.
Guest answered as before, that he would ride,
Because that night at Thickwood must he bide;
So silent now with wandering weary eyes
She watched his men do on their riding guise,
Then led him from the hall but listlessly,
As though she heeded nought where she might be.
So forth he rode, but turned and backward gazed
Before his folk the garth-gate latch had raised,
And saw her standing yet anigh the hall,
With her long shadow cast upon its wall,
As with her eyes turned down upon the ground
A long lock of her hair she wound and wound
About her hand. Then turning once again,
He passed the gate and shook his bridle-rein.

Now but a short way had he gone ere he
Beheld a man draw nigh their company,

Who, when they met, with fair words Guest did greet,
And said that Olaf Peacock bade him meet
Him and his men, and bid them to his stead:
"And well ye wot, O Goodman Guest," he said,
"That all day long it snoweth meat and drink
At Herdholt, and the gurgle and the clink
Of mead and horns, the harp alone doth still."
Guest laughed, and said, "Well, be that as it will,
Get swiftly back, and say that I will come
To look upon the marvels of his home
And hear his goodly voice; but may not bide
The night through, for to Thickwood must I ride."
Then the man turned and smote his horse; but they
Rode slowly by the borders of the bay
Upon that fresh and sunny afternoon,
Noting the sea-birds' cry and surf's soft tune,
Until at last into the dale they came,
And saw the gilt roof-ridge of Herdholt flame
In the bright sunlight over the fresh grass,
O'er which the restless white-woolled lambs did pass
And querulous grey ewes; and wide around,
Near and far up the dale, they heard the sound
Of lowing kine, and the blithe neat-herd's voice,
For in those days did all things there rejoice.
Now presently from out the garth they saw
A goodly company unto them draw,
And thitherward came Olaf and his men;
So joyous greeting was betwixt them when

They met, and side by side the two chiefs rode,
Right glad at heart unto the fair abode.

Great limbed was Olaf Hauskuldson, well knit,
And like a chief upon his horse did sit;
Clear browed and wide eyed was he, smooth of skin
Through fifty rough years; of his mother's kin,
The Erse king's daughter, did his short lip tell,
And dark lashed grey blue eyes; like a clear bell
His voice was yet, despite of waves and wind,
And such a goodly man you scarce might find,
As for his years, in all the northern land
He held a gold wrought spear in his right hand,
A chief's gold ring his left arm did upbear,
And as a mighty king's was all his gear,
Well shaped of Flanders' cloth, and silk and gold
Thus they their way up to the garth did hold,
And Thord the Short, Guest's son, was next thereby,
A brisk man and a brave; so presently
They passed the garth wall, and drew rein before
The new built hall's well carven, fair porch-door,
And Guest laughed out with pleasure, to behold
Its goodly fashion, as the Peacock told
With what huge heed and care the place was wrought,
And of the Norway earl's great wood, he brought
Over the sea; then in they went and Guest
Gazed through the cool dusk, till his eyes did rest
Upon the noble stories, painted fair
On the high panelling and roof-boards there;

For over the high-seat, in his ship there lay
The gold-haired Baldur, god of the dead day,
The spring-flowers round his high pile, waiting there
Until the Gods thereto the torch should bear;
And they were wrought on this side and on that,
Drawing on towards him. There was Frey, and sat
On the gold-bristled boar, who first they say
Ploughed the brown earth, and made it green for Frey.
Then came dark-bearded Niord; and after him
Freyia, thin-robed, about her ankles slim
The grey cats playing. In another place
Thor's hammer gleamed o'er Thor's red-bearded face;
And Heimdall, with the gold horn slung behind,
That in the God's-dusk he shall surely wind,
Sickening all hearts with fear; and last of all
Was Odin's sorrow wrought upon the wall,
As slow-paced, weary-faced, he went along,
Anxious with all the tales of woe and wrong
His ravens, Thought and Memory, bring to him.

Guest looked on these until his eyes grew dim,
Then turned about, and had no word to praise,
So wrought in him the thought of those strange days
Done with so long ago. But furthermore
Upon the other side, the deeds of Thor
Were duly done; the fight in the far sea
With him who rings the world's iniquity,
The Midgard Worm; strife in the giants' land,
With snares and mockeries thick on either hand

And dealings with the Evil One who brought
Death even amid the Gods—all these well wrought
Did Guest behold, as in a dream, while still
His joyous men the echoing hall did fill
With many-voiced strange clamour, as of these
They talked, and stared on all the braveries.
  Then to the presses in the cloth-room there
Did Olaf take him, and showed hangings fair
Brought from the southlands far across the sea,
And English linen and fair napery,
And Flemish cloth; then back into the hall
He led him, and took arms from off the wall,
And let the mail-coat rings run o'er his hands,
And strung strange bows brought from the fiery lands.
Then through the butteries he made him pass,
And, smiling, showed what winter stock yet was;
Fish, meal, and casks of wine, and goodly store
Of honey, that the bees had grumbled o'er
In clover fields of Kent. Out went they then
And saw in what wise Olaf's serving-men
Dealt with the beasts, and what fair stock he had,
And how the maids were working blithe and glad
Within the women's chamber. Then at last,
Guest smiled, and said;
                                        "Right fair is all thou hast,
A noble life thou livest certainly,
And in such wise as now, still may it be,
Nor mayst thou know beginning of ill days!
Now let it please thee that we go our ways,

E'en as I said, for the sun falleth low."

"So be it then," said he. Nor shalt thou go
Giftless henceforth; and I will go with thee
Some little way, for we my sons may see;
And fain I am to know how to thine eyes
They seem, because I know thee for most wise,
And that the cloud of time from thee hides less
Than from most men, of woe or happiness."

With that he gave command, and men brought forth
Two precious things; a hat of goodly worth,
Of fur of Russia, with a gold chain wound
Thrice round it, and a coin of gold that bound
The chain's end in the front, and on the same
A Greek king's head was wrought, of mighty fame
In olden time; this unto Guest he gave,
And smiled to see his deep-set eyes and grave
Gleam out with joy thereover: but to Thord,
Guest's son, he gave a well-adorned sword
And English-'broidered belt; and then once more
They mounted by the goodly carven door,
And to their horses gat all Guest's good men,
And forth they rode toward Laxriver: but when
They had just overtopped a low knoll's brow,
Olaf cried out, "There play hot hearts enow
In the cold waves!" Then Guest looked, and afar
Beheld the tide play on the sandy bar
About the stream's mouth, as the sea waves rushed

In over it and back the land-stream pushed;
But in the dark wide pool mid foam-flecks white,
Beneath the slanting afternoon sunlight,
He saw white bodies sporting, and the air
Light from the south-west up the slopes did bear
Sound of their joyous cries as there they played.

Then said he, "Goodman, thou art well apaid
Of thy fair sons, if they shall deal as well
With earth as water."
"Nought there is to tell
Of great deeds at their hands as yet," said he;
"But look you, how they note our company!"

For waist-high from the waves one rose withal,
And sent a shrill voice like a sea-mew's call
Across the river, then all turned toward land,
And beat the waves to foam with foot and hand,
And certes kept no silence; up the side
They scrambled, and about the shore spread wide
Seeking their raiment, and the yellowing sun
Upon the line of moving bodies shone,
As running here and there with laugh and shout
They flung the linen and grey cloth about,
Yet spite of all their clamour clad them fast.
So Guest and Olaf o'er the green slopes passed
At sober pace, the while the other men
Raced down to meet the swimmers.

"Many then
There are, who have no part or lot in thee
Among these lads," said Guest.

"Yea, such there be,"
Said Olaf, "sons of dale-dwellers hereby;
But Kiartan rules the swimming."

Earnestly
Guest gazed upon the lads as they drew near,
And scarcely now he seemed the words to hear
That Olaf spake, who talked about his race
And how they first had dwelling in that place;
But at the last Guest turned his horse about
Up stream, and drew rein, yet, as one in doubt,
Looked o'er his shoulder at the youths withal;
But nought said Olaf, doubting what should fall
From those wise lips.

Then Guest spake, "Who are these?
Tell me their names; yon lad upon his knees,
Turning the blue cloak over with his hands,
While over him a sturdy fellow stands,
Talking belike?"

"Hauskuld, my youngest son,"
Said Olaf, "kneels there, but the standing one
Is An the Black, my house-carle, a stout man."

"Good," Guest said; "name the one who e'en now ran
Through upraised hands a glittering silver chain,

And, as we look now, gives it back again
Unto a red haired youth, tall, fair, and slim"

"Haldor it was who gave the chain to him,
And Helgi took it," Olaf said

Then Guest
"There kneeleth one in front of all the rest,
Less clad than any there, and hides from me
Twain who are sitting nigher to the sea?"

Then Olaf looked with shaded eyes and said
"Steinthor, the sluggard, is it by my head
He hideth better men! nay, look now, look!"

Then toward the stream his spear butt Olaf shook,
As Steinthor rose, and gat somewhat aside,
And showed the other twain he first did hide
On a grey stone anigh unto the stream
Sat a tall youth whose golden head did gleam
In the low sun, half covered was his breast,
His right arm bare as yet, a sword did rest
Upon his knees, and some half foot of it
He from the sheath had drawn, a man did sit
Upon the grass before him, slim was he,
Black-haired and tall, and looked up smilingly
Into the other's face, with one hand laid
Upon the sword sheath nigh the broad grey blade,
And seemed as though he listened.

Then spake Guest:
"No need, O friend, to ask about the rest,
Since I have seen these; for without a word
Kiartan I name the man who draws the sword
From out the sheath, and low down in the shade
Before him Bodli Thorleikson is laid.
But tell me of that sword, who bore it erst?"

Then Olaf laughed, "Some call that sword accursed;
Bodli now bears it, which the Eastlander
Geirmund, my daughter's husband, once did wear,
Hast thou not heard the tale? he won the maid
By my wife's word, wherefor with gold he paid,
Or so I deemed; but whereas of good kin
The man was, and the women hot herein,
I stood not in the way; well, but his love,
Whate'er it was, quenched not his will to rove;
He left her, but would nowise leave the sword,
And so she helped herself, and for reward
Got that, and a curse with it, babblers say.
—Let see if it prevail 'gainst my good day!"

Guest answered nought at all, his head was turned
Eastward, away from where the low sun burned
Above the swimmers. Olaf spake once more:
"Wise friend, thou thus hast heard their names told o'er,
How thinkest thou? hast thou the heart to tell
Which in the years to come shall do right well?"

Guest spake nought for a while, and then he said,
But yet not turning any more his head:
"Surely of this at least thou wouldst be glad
If Kiartan while he lived more glory had
Than any man now waxing in the land."

Then even as he spoke he raised his hand
And smote his horse, and rode upon his way
With no word more; neither durst Olaf stay
His swift departing, doubting of his mood;
For though indeed the word he spake was good,
Yet some vague fear he seemed to leave behind,
And Olaf scarce durst seek, lest he should find
Some ill thing lurking by his glory's side.
But after Guest his son and men did ride,
And forth to Thickwood with no stay they went.
But now, the journey and the day nigh spent,
Unto his father as they rode turned Thord,
With mind to say to him some common word,
But stared astonished, for the great tears ran
Over the wrinkled cheeks of the old man,
Yea, and adown his beard, nor shame had he
That Thord in such a plight his face should see,
At last he spake:
"Thou wonderest, O my son,
To see the tears fall down from such an one
As I am—folly is it in good sooth
Bewraying inward grief; but pain and ruth
Work in me so, I may not hold my peace

About the woes, that as thy years increase
Thou shalt behold fall on the country-side—
—But me the grey cairn ere that day shall hide—
Fair men and women have I seen to-day,
Yet I weep not because these pass away,
Sad though that is, but rather weep for this,
That they know not upon their day of bliss
How their worn hearts shall fail them ere they die,
How sore the weight of woe on them shall lie,
No sighing eases, wherewithal no hope,
No pride, no rage, shall make them fit to cope.
Remember what folk thou this day hast seen,
And in what joyous steads thy feet have been,
Then think of this!—that men may look to see
Love slaying love, and ruinous victory,
And truth called lies, and kindness turned to hate,
And prudence sowing seeds of all debate!
Son, thou shalt live to hear when I am dead
Of Bodli standing over Kiartan's head,
His friend, his foster-brother, and his bane,
That he in turn e'en such an end may gain.
Woe worth the while! forget it, and be blind!
Look not before thee! the road left behind,
Let that be to thee as a tale well told
To make thee merry when thou growest old!"

So spake he; but by this time had they come
Unto the wood that lay round Armod's home,
So on the tree-beset and narrow way

They entered now, and left behind the day;
And whatso things thenceforth to Guest befell,
No more of him the story hath to tell.

Gudrun twice Wedded, Widowed, and Wooed of Kiartan.

SO wore the time away, nor long it was
Ere somewhat of Guest's forecast came to pass.
Drawn by her beauty, Thorvald wooed Gudrun;
Saying withal that he was such an one
As fainer was to wed a wife than lands,
Readier by far to give forth from his hands
That which he had, than take aught of her kin.
And in such wise he did not fail to win
His fond desire, and, therewith, wretched life.
For she who deemed nought worth so much of strife
As to say 'no' for ever, being wed, found
How the chain galled whereto she now was bound,
And more and more began to look on him
With hate that would be scorn, with eyes grown dim
With hope of change that came not, and lips set
For ever with the stifling of regret.
Coarse Thorvald was, and rough and passionate,
And little used on change of days to wait;
And as she ever gloomed before his eyes,
Rage took the place of the first grieved surprise,
Wherewith he found that he who needs must love

Could get no love in turn, nay, nor e'en move
Her heart to kindness: then as nothing strange
Still with sad loathing looks she took the change
She noted in him, as if all were done
Between them, and no deed beneath the sun
That he could do would now be worse to her.
Judge if the hot heart of the man could bear
Such days as these! Upon a time it fell
That he, most fain indeed to love her well,
Would she but turn to him, had striven sore
To gain her love, and yet gat nothing more
Than a faint smile of scorn, 'neath eyes whose gaze
Seemed fixed for ever on the hoped for days,
Wherein he no more should have part or lot;
Then mingled hate with love in him, and hot
His heart grew past all bearing; round about
He stared, as one who hears the eager shout
Of closing foes, when he to death is brought;
In his fierce heart thought crowded upon thought,
Till he saw not and heard not, but rose up
And cast upon the floor his half-filled cup,
And crying out, smote her upon the face;
Then strode adown the hushed and crowded place,
For meal-time was it, till he reached the door;
Then gat his horse, and over hill and moor,
Scarce knowing where he went, rode furiously.

But in the hall, folk turned them round to see
What thing Gudrun would do, who for a while

Sat pale and silent, with a deadly smile
Upon her lips; then called to where she sat
Folk from the hall, and talked of this and that
Gaily, as one who hath no care or pain:
Yea, when the goodman gat him back again
She met him changed, so that he well-nigh thought
That better days his hasty blow had brought.
And still as time wore on, day after day
Wondering, he saw her seeming blithe and gay;
So he, though sore misdoubting him of this,
Took what he might of pleasure and of bliss,
And put thought back. So time wore till the spring,
And then the goodman rode unto the Thing,
Not over light of heart, or free from fear,
Though his wife's face at parting was all clear
Of frown or sullenness; but he being gone,
Next morn Gudrun rode with one man alone
Forth unto Bathstead; there her tale she told,
And as in those days law strained not to hold
Folk whom love held not, or some common tie,
So her divorce was set forth speedily,
For mighty were her kin.

And now once more
At Bathstead did she dwell, free as before,
And, smiling, heard of how her husband fared
When by the Hill of Laws he stood and heard
The words, that he belike half thought to hear,
Which took from him a thing once held so dear,
That all was nought thereby.

Now wise ones tell
That there was one who used to note her well
Within her husband's hall, and many say
That talk of love they had before the day
That she went back to Bathstead; how that was
I know not surely; but it came to pass
That scarcely had abated the first rage
Of her old mate, and scarce less like a cage
Of red-hot iron 'gan to feel his life,
Ere this man, Thord, had won Gudrun to wife;
So, since the man was brisk and brave and fair,
And she had known him when her days were drear,
And turned with hope and longing to his eyes,
Kind amid hard things, in most joyous wise
Their life went, and she deemed she loved him well;
And the strange things that Guest did once foretell,
Which morn and noon and eve she used to set
Before her eyes, she now would fain forget;
Alas! forgotten or remembered, still
Midst joy or sorrow fate shall work its will;
Three months they lived in joy and peace enow,
Till on a June night did the south-west blow
The rainy rack o'er Gudrun's sleeping head,
While in the firth was rolled her husband dead
Toward the black cliffs; drowned was he, says my tale,
By wizard's spells amidst a summer gale.

Then back to Bathstead Gudrun came again,
To sit with fierce heart brooding o'er her pain,

While life and time seemed made to torture her,
That she the utmost of all pain might bear,
To please she knew not whom; and yet mid this,
And all her raging for the vanished bliss,
Would Guest's words float up to her memory,
And quicken cold life; then would she cast by
As something vile the comfort that they brought,
Yet, none the less, still stronger grew that thought,
Unheeded, and unchidden therefore, round
The weary wall of woe, her life that bound.

So wore the months; spring with its longings came,
And now in every mouth was Kiartan's name,
And daily now must Gudrun's dull ears bear
Tales of the prowess of his youth to hear,
While in his cairn forgotten lay her love.
For this man, said they, all men's hearts did move,
Nor yet might envy cling to such an one,
So far beyond all dwellers 'neath the sun;
Great was he, yet so fair of face and limb
That all folk wondered much, beholding him,
How such a man could be; no fear he knew,
And all in manly deeds he could outdo;
Fleet-foot, a swimmer strong, an archer good,
Keen-eyed to know the dark waves' changing mood;
Sure on the crag, and with the sword so skilled,
That when he played therewith the air seemed filled
With light of gleaming blades; therewith was he
Of noble speech, though says not certainly

My tale, that aught of his be left behind
With rhyme and measure deftly intertwined;
Well skilled was he, too, in the craftsman's lore
To deal with iron mid the stithy's roar,
And many a sword-blade knew his heavy hand.
Shortly, if he amid ten kings should stand,
All men would think him worthier man than they;
And yet withal it was his daily way
To be most gentle both of word and deed,
And ever folk would seek him in their need,
Nor was there any child but loved him well.

Such things about him ever would men tell,
Until their hearts swelled in them as they thought
How great a glory to their land was brought,
Seeing that this man was theirs. Such love and praise
Kiartan's beginning had in those fair days,
While Gudrun sat sick-eyed, and hearkened this,
Still brooding on the late-passed days of bliss,
And thinking still how worthless such things were.

But now when midsummer was drawing near,
As on an eve folk sat within the hall,
Man unto man far off did they hear call,
And then the sound of horse-hoofs; Oswif rose,
And went into the porch to look for those
Who might be coming, and at last folk heard,
Close to the porch, the new-come travellers' word,
And turned to meet them; Gudrun sat alone

High on the daïs when all folk were gone,
And playing with her golden finger-rings,
Set all her heart to think of bygone things,
Till hateful seemed all hopes, all thoughts of men.

Yet did she turn unto their voices, when
Folk back again into the hall did crowd,
Torch-litten now, laughing and talking loud,
Then as the guests adown the long hall drew
Olaf the Peacock presently she knew,
Hand in hand with her father; but behind
Came two young men; then rose up to her mind,
Against her will, the tales of Kiartan told,
Because she deemed the one, whose hair of gold
In the new torch-light gleamed, was even he,
And that the black-haired high-browed one must be
Bodli, the son of Thorleik; but with that
Up to the place where listlessly she sat,
They came, and on her feet she now must stand
To welcome them; then Olaf took her hand,
And looked on her with eyes compassionate,
And said:

"O Gudrun, ill has been thy fate,
But surely better days shall soon be thine,
For not for nought do eyes like thine eyes shine
Upon the hard world; thou shalt bless us yet
In many a wise and all thy woes forget."

She answered nought, but drew her hand away,

And heavier yet the weight upon her lay
That thus men spake of her. But, turning round,
Kiartan upon the other hand she found,
Gazing upon her with wide hungry eyes
And parted lips; then did strange joy surprise
Her listless heart, and changed her old world was;
Ere she had time to think, all woe did pass
Away from her, and all her life grew sweet,
And scarce she felt the ground beneath her feet,
Or knew who stood around, or in what place
Of heaven or earth she was; soft grew her face;
In tears that fell not yet, her eyes did swim,
As, trembling, she reached forth her hand to him,
And with the shame of love her smooth cheeks burned,
And her lips quivered, as if sore they yearned
For words they had not learned, and might not know
Till night and loneliness their form should show.

But Kiartan's face a happy smile did light,
Kind, loving, confident; good hap and might
Seemed in his voice as now he spake, and said:

"They say the dead for thee will ne'er be dead,
And on this eve I thought in sooth to have
Labour enow to draw thee from the grave
Of the old days; but thou rememberest,
Belike, days earlier yet, that men call best
Of all days, when as younglings erst we met.
Thou thinkest now thou never didst forget

This face of mine, since now most certainly
The eyes are kind wherewith thou lookst on me."

A shade came o'er her face, but quickly passed:
"Yea," said she, "if such pleasant days might last,
As when we wandered laughing hand in hand
Along the borders of the shell-strewn strand."

She wondered at the sound of her own voice,
She chid her heart that it must needs rejoice,
She marvelled why her soul with fear was filled;
But quickly every questioning was stilled
As he sat down by her.
Old Oswif smiled
To see her sorrow in such wise beguiled,
And Olaf laughed for joy, and many a thought
Of happy loves to Bodli's heart was brought
As by his friend he sat, and saw his face
So bright with bliss; and all the merry place
Ran over with goodwill that sight to see,
And the hours passed in great festivity.
At last beneath the glimmer of the moon,
Fanned by the soft sea-wind that tempers June,
Homeward they rode, sire, son and foster-son,
Kiartan half joyful that the eve was done,
And he had leisure for himself to weave
Tales of the joyful way that from that eve
Should lead to perfect bliss; Bodli no less
Rejoicing in his fellow's happiness,

Dreaming of such-like joy to come to him,
And Olaf, thinking how that nowise dim
The glory of his line through these should grow.

But while in peace these through the night did go,
Vexed by new thoughts and old thoughts, Gudrun lay
Upon her bed: she watched him go away,
And her heart sank within her, and there came,
With pain of that departing, pity and shame,
That struggling with her love yet made it strong,
That called her longing blind, yet made her long
Yet more for more desire, what seeds soe'er
Of sorrow hate and ill were hidden there.
So with her strong heart wrestled love, till she
Sank 'neath the hand of sleep, and quietly
Beneath the new-risen sun she lay at rest,
The bed-gear fallen away from her white breast,
One arm deep buried in her hair, one spread
Abroad, across the 'broideries of the bed,
A smile upon her lips, and yet a tear,
Scarce dry, but stayed anigh her dainty ear—
How fair, how soft, how kind she seemed that morn,
Ere she anew to love and life was born.

A little space to part these twain indeed
Was seven short miles of hill and moor and mead,
And soon the threshold of the Bathstead hall
Knew nigh as much of Kiartan's firm footfall
As of the sweep of Gudrun's kirtle-hem,

And sweet past words to tell life grew to them;
Sweet the awaking in the morn, when lay
Below the hall the narrow winding way,
The friend that led, the foe that kept apart;
And sweet the joyful flutter of the heart
Anigh the door, ere clinging memory
Gave place to rapturous sight, and eye met eye;
Sweet the long hours of converse when each word
Like fairest music still seemed doubly heard,
Caught by the ear and clung to by the heart;
Yea, even most sweet the minute they must part,
Because the veil, that so oft time must draw
Before them, fell, and clear without a flaw,
Their hearts saw love, that moment they did stand
Ere lip left lip, or hand fell down from hand;
Yea, that passed o'er, still sweet and bitter sweet
The yearning pain that stayed the lingering feet
Upon the threshold, and the homeward way;
And silent chamber covered up from day
For thoughts of words unsaid—ah, sweet the night
Amidst its dreams of manifold delight!

And yet sometimes pangs of perplexed pain
Would torture Gudrun, as she thought again
On Guest and his forecasting of her dream;
And through the dark of days to come would gleam
Fear, like a flame of hell shot suddenly
Up through spring meadows 'twixt fair tree and tree,
Though little might she see the flaws, whereof

That past dream warned her, midst her dream of love;
And whatso things her eyes refused to see,
Made wise by fear, none others certainly
Might see in love so seeming smooth as this,
That looked to all men like the door of bliss
Unto the twain, and to the country-side
Good hope and joy, that thus so fast were tied
The bonds 'twixt two such houses as were these,
And folk before them saw long years of peace.

Of Bodli Thorleikson the story says,
That he, o'ershadowed still by Kiartan's praise,
Was second but to him; although, indeed,
He, who perchance the love of men did need
More than his fellow, less their hearts might move;
Yet fair to all men seemed the trust and love
Between the friends, and fairer unto none
Than unto Olaf, who scarce loved his son
More than his brother's son; now seemed it too,
That this new love closer the kinsmen drew
Than e'en before, and whatso either did
The other knew, and scarce their thoughts seemed hid
One from the other.
So as day by day
Went Kiartan unto Bathstead, still the way
Seemed shorter if his friend beside him rode;
Then might he ease his soul of that great load
Of love unsatisfied, by words, and take
Mockeries in turn, grown sweet for that name's sake

They wrapped about, or glow with joy to hear
The praises of the heart he held so dear,
And laugh with joy and pleasure of his life,
To note how Bodli's heart withal, seemed rife
With love that his love kindled, though as yet
It wandered, on no heart of woman set.
So Bodli, nothing loth, went many a day,
Whenso they would, to make the lovers gay,
Whenso they would, to get him gone, that these
E'en with such yearning words their souls might please
As must be spoken, but sound folly still
To aught but twain, because no tongue hath skill
To tell their meaning: kinder, Kiartan deemed,
Grew Bodli day by day, and ever seemed
Well-nigh as happy as the loving twain,
And unto Bodli life seemed nought but gain,
And fair the days were.
On a day it fell
As the three talked, they 'gan in sport to tell
The names o'er of such women good and fair,
As in the land that tide unwedded were,
Naming a mate for Bodli, and still he
Must laugh and shake his head;
"Then over sea,"
Quoth Kiartan, "mayhap such an one there is
That thou mayst deem the getting of her bliss;
Go forth and win her with the rover's sword!"

Then Bodli laughed, and cast upon the board

The great grey blade and ponderous iron hilt,
All unadorned, the yoke-fellow of guilt,
And said, "Go, sword, and fetch me home a bride!
But here in Iceland have I will to bide
With those that love me, till the fair days change."

Then Gudrun said, "Things have there been more strange,
Than that we three should sit above the oars,
The while on even keel 'twixt the low shores
Our long-ship breasts the Thames flood, or the Seine.
Methinks in biding here is little gain,
Cooped up in this cold corner of the world."

Then up sprang Kiartan, seized the sword, and hurled
Its weight aloft, and caught it by the hilt
As down it fell, and cried, "Would that the tilt
Were even now being rigged above the ship!
Would that we stood to see the oars first dip
In the green waves! nay, rather would that we
Above the bulwarks now saw Italy,
With all its beacons flaring! Sheathe thy sword,
Fair foster-brother, till I say the word
That draws it forth; and, Gudrun, never fear
That thou a word or twain of me shalt hear,
E'en if the birds must bear them o'er the sea."

Her eyes were fixed upon him lovingly
As thus he spake, and Bodli smiling saw

Her hand to Kiartan's ever nigher draw;
Then he rose up and sheathed the sword, and said,
"Nay, rather if I be so hard to wed,
I yet must think of roving, so I go
To talk to Oswif, all the truth to know
About the news the chapmen carried here,
That Olaf Tryggvison his sword doth rear
'Gainst Hacon and his fortune."

Therewithal
He laughed, and gat him swiftly from the hall,
And found the old man, nor came back again
Until through sun and shadow had the twain
Sat long together, and the hall 'gan fill.
Then did he deem his friend sat somewhat still,
And something strange he saw in Gudrun's eyes
As she gazed on him; nor did fail to rise
In his own heart the shadow of a shade,
That made him deem the world less nobly made,
And yet was like to pleasure. On the way
Back home again, not much did Kiartan say,
And what he spake was well-nigh mockery
Of speech, wherewith he had been wont to free
His heart from longings grown too sweet to bear.
But time went on, and still the days did wear
With little seeming change; if love grew cold
In Kiartan's heart one day, the next o'er bold,
O'er frank, he noted not who might be by,
When he unto his love was drawing nigh;
Gudrun gloomed not; as merry as before

Did Bodli come and go 'twixt dais and door.
Only perchance a little oftener they
Fell upon talk of the fair lands that lay
Across the seas, and sometimes would a look
Cross Gudrun's face that seemed a half rebuke
To Kiartan, as all over-eagerly
He talked about the life beyond the sea,
As thereof he had heard the stories tell.
Then Bodli sometimes into musings fell,
So dreamlike, that he might not tell his thought
When he again to common life was brought.

So passed the seasons, but in autumn-tide
The foster-brothers did to Burgfirth ride,
Unto a ship new come to White-river;
Talk with the outland chapmen had they there,
And Kiartan bade the captain in the end
Back unto Herdholt as his guest to wend,—
And nothing loth he went with him; and now
Great tidings thereupon began to show
Of Hacon slain, his son thrust from the land,
And Norway in fair peace beneath the hand
Of Olaf Tryggvison; nor did he fail
To tell about the king full many a tale,
And praise him for the noblest man, that e'er
Had held the tiller, or cast forth the spear:
And Kiartan listened eagerly, yet seemed
As if amid the tale he well-nigh dreamed,
And now withal, when he to Bathstead went,

Less than before would talk of his intent
To see the outlands, to his listening love;
And when at whiles she spake to him thereof
Lightly he answered her, and smile or kiss
Would change their talk to idle words of bliss:
Less of her too to Bodli now he spake,
Although this other, (for her beauty's sake
He told himself) to hear of her was fain;
And he, for his part, sometimes felt a pain,
As though the times were changing over fast,
When Kiartan let the word of his go past
Unnoted, that in other days belike
Had nowise failed from out his heart to strike
The sparks of lovesome praise.
But now Yule-tide
Was come at last, and folk from far and wide
Went to their neighbours' feasts, and as wont was
All Bathstead unto Herdholt hall did pass,
And the feast lasted long, and all folk gat
Things that their souls desired, and Gudrun sat
In the high-seat beside the goodwife there.

But ever now her wary ears did hear
The new king's name bandied from mouth to mouth,
And talk of those new-comers from the south;
And through her anxious heart a sharp pain smote
As Kiartan's face she eagerly 'gan note
And sighed; because, leaned forward on the board,
He sat, with eager face hearkening each word,

Nor speaking aught; then long with hungry eyes
She sat regarding him, nor yet would rise
A word unto her lips: and all the while
Bodli gazed on them with a fading smile
About his lips, and eyes that ever grew
More troubled still, until he hardly knew
What folk were round about.
So passed away
Yule-tide at Herdholt, cold day following day,
Till spring was gone, and Gudrun had not failed
To win both many days where joy prevailed,
And many a pang of fear; till so it fell
That in the summer, whereof now we tell,
Upon a day in blithe mood Kiartan came
To Bathstead, not as one who looks for blame,
And Bodli with him, sad-eyed, silent, dull,
Noted of Gudrun, who no less was full
Of merry talk, yea, more than her wont was.
But as the hours toward eventide did pass,
Said Kiartan:
"Love, make we the most of bliss,
For though, indeed, not the last day this is
Whereon we twain shall meet in such a wise,
Yet shalt thou see me soon in fighting guise,
And hear the horns blow up our *Loth to go*,
For in White-River—
"Is it even so,"
She broke in, "that these feet abide behind?
Men call me hard, but thou hast known me kind;

Men call me fair, my body give I thee;
Men call me dainty, let the rough salt sea
Deal with me as it will, so thou be near!
Let me share glory with thee, and take fear
That thy heart throws aside!"
Hand joined to hand,
As one who prays, and trembling, did she stand
With parted lips, and pale and weary-faced.
But up and down the hall-floor Bodli paced
With clanking sword, and brows set in a frown,
And scarce less pale than she. The sun low down
Shone through the narrow windows of the hall,
And on the gold upon her breast did fall,
And gilt her slim clasped hands.
There Kiartan stood
Gazing upon her in strange wavering mood,
Now longing sore to clasp her to his heart,
And pray her, too, that they might ne'er depart,
Now well-nigh ready to say such a word
As cutteth love across as with a sword;
So fought love in him with the craving vain
The love of all the wondering world to gain,
Though such he named it not. And so at last
His eyes upon the pavement did he cast,
And knit his brow as though some word to say;
Then fell her outstretched hands, she cried:
"Nay, nay!
Thou need'st not speak, I will not ask thee twice
To take a gift, a good gift, and be wise;

I know my heart, thou know'st it not; farewell,
Maybe that other tales the Skalds shall tell
Than of thy great deeds."

Still her face was pale,
As with a sound betwixt a sigh and wail,
She brushed by Bodli, who, aghast, did stand
With open mouth, and vainly stretched-out hand;
But Kiartan followed her a step or two,
Then stayed, bewildered by his sudden woe;
But even therewith, as nigh the door she was,
She turned back suddenly, and straight did pass,
Trembling all over, to his side, and said,
With streaming eyes:

"Let not my words be weighed
As a man's words are! O, fair love, go forth
And come thou back again, made no more worth
Unto this heart; but worthier it may be
To the dull world thy worth that cannot see.
Go forth, and let the rumour of thee run
Through every land that is beneath the sun;
For know I not, indeed, that everything
Thou winnest at the hands of lord or king,
Is surely mine, as thou art mine at last?"

Then round about his neck her arms she cast,
And wept right sore, and touched with love and shame,
Must Kiartan offer to leave hope of fame,
And noble life; but midst her tears she smiled,

"Go forth, my love, and be thou not beguiled
By woman's tears, I spake but as a fool,
We of the north wrap not our men in wool,
Lest they should die at last; nay, be not moved,
To think that thou a faint-heart fool hast loved!"

For now his tears fell too, he said: "My sweet,
Ere the ship sails we yet again shall meet
To say farewell, a little while, and then,
When I come back to hold my place mid men,
With honour won for thee—how fair it is
To think on now, the sweetness and the bliss!"

Some little words she said no pen could write,
Upon his face she laid her fingers white,
And, midst of kisses, with his hair did play;
Then, smiling through her tears, she went away.
Nor heeded Bodli aught—
—Men say the twain,
Kiartan and Gudrun, never met again
In loving wise; that each to each no more
Their eyes looked kind on this side death's dark shor
That midst their tangled life they must forget,
Till they were dead, that e'er their lips had met.

For ere the day that Kiartan meant to come
And kiss his love once more within her home,
The south-east wind, that had stayed hitherto
Their sailing, changed, and northwest now it blew;

And Kálf, the captain, urged them to set forth,
Because that tide the wind loved not the north,
And now the year grew late for long delay.
Night was it when he spake; at dawn next day,
Before the door at Herdholt might men see,
Armed, and in saddle, a goodly company.
Kiartan, bright-eyed and flushed, restless withal,
As on familiar things his eyes did fall,
Yet eager to be gone, and smiling still,
For pride and hope and love his soul did fill,
As of his coming life he thought, and saw
In all the days that were to be, no flaw.
About him were his fellows, ten such men
As in the land had got no equals then,
By him his foster-brother sat, as true
As was the steel the rover's hand erst drew;
There stood his father, flushed with joy and pride,
By the fair-carven door that did abide,
Till he fulfilled of glory came again
To take his bride before the eyes of men.

Now skipper Kálf, clad in the Peacock's gift,
Unto the south his gold-wrought spear did lift,
And Kiartan stooped and kissed his sire. A shout
Rose from the home-men, as they turned about,
And trotted jingling down the grassy knoll.
Silent awhile rode Kiartan, till his soul,
Filled with a many thoughts, in speech o'erflowed,
And unto Bodli, who beside him rode,

He fell to talk of all that they should do
In the fair countries that they journeyed to.
Not Norway only, or the western lands,
In time to come, he said, might know their hands,
But fairer places, folk of greater fame,
Where 'neath the shadow of the Roman name
Sat the Greek king, gold-clad, with bloodless sword.
But as he spoke Bodli said here a word
And there a word, and knew not what he said,
Nay, scarcely knew what wild thoughts filled his head,
What longings burned, like a still quickening flame,
Within his sad heart.

So that night they came
To Burg-firth and the place upon the strand
Where by the ready ship the tents did stand,
And there they made good cheer, and slept that night,
But on the morrow, with the earliest light,
They gat a ship-board, and, all things being done,
Upon a day when low clouds hid the sun,
And 'neath the harsh north-west down drave the rain,
They drew the gangway to the ship again,
And ran the oars out. There did Kiartan stand
By Kálf, who took the tiller in his hand
And conned the rising bows; but when at last
Toward the grey sky the wet oar-blades were cast,
And space 'twixt stern and land 'gan widen now,
Kiartan cried out and ran forth to the prow,
While rope and block yet beat confusedly,
And shook his drawn sword o'er the dark grey sea;

And step for step behind him Bodli went,
And on his sword-hilt, with a like intent,
He laid his hand, and half drew from its sheath
The lover's sword; then with a deep-drawn breath,
Most like a sigh, he thrust it back again,
His face seemed sharpened with a sudden pain.
He turned him round the driving scud to face,
His breast heaved, and he staggered in his place,
And stretched his strong arms forth with a low moan
Unto the hidden hills, 'neath which alone
Sat Gudrun—sat his love—and therewithal
Down did the bows into the black trough fall,
Up rose the oar-song, through the waters grey,
Unto the south the good ship took her way.

The Dealings of King Olaf Tryggvison with the Icelanders.

NOW tells the tale that safe to Drontheim came
Kiartan with all his folk, and the great fame
Of Olaf Tryggvison then first they knew,
When thereof spake the townsmen to the crew,
But therewithal yet other news they heard,
Which seemed to one and all a heavy word;
How that the king, from the old customs turned,
Now with such zeal toward his new faith burned,
That thereby nothing else to him was good
But that all folk should bow before the Rood.

When Kiartan's coming thitherward betid
Three ships of Iceland lay there in the Nid,
Manned by stout men enow; downcast were these
Who had been glad enow the king to please;
And save their goods, and lives, perchance, withal,
But knew not how their forefathers to call
Souls damned for ever and ever; yet they said
That matters drew so swiftly to a head,
That when they met the king he passed them by
With head turned round, or else with threatening eye
Scowled on them; "And when Yule-tide comes," said they,
"We look to have from him a settled day
When we must change our faith or bide the worst."

"Well," Kiartan said, "this king is not the first
To think the world is made for him alone;
Who knows how things will go ere all is done?
God wot, I wish my will done even as he;
I hate him not."
And therewith merrily
From out the ship the men of Herdholt went;
A bright eve was it, and the good town sent
Thin smoke and blue straight upward through the air,
For it had rained of late, and here and there
Sauntered the townsfolk, man and maid and child;
Where street met quay a fiddle's sound beguiled
A knot of listening folk, who no less turned
And stared hard as the westering sunbeams burned

Upon the steel and scarlet of that band,
Whom, as ye well may wot, no niggard hand
Had furnished forth ; so up the long street then,
Gazing about, well gazed at, went the men,
A goodly sight. But e'en as they would wend
About the corner where that street had end,
High up in air nearby 'gan ring a chime
Whose sweetness seemed to bless e'en that sweet time
With double blessing. Kiartan stayed his folk
When first above his head that sound outbroke,
And listened smiling, till he heard a sigh
Close by him, and met Bodli's wandering eye
That fell before his.
Softly Kiartan spake:
"Now would Gudrun were here e'en for the sake
Of this sweet sound ! nought have I heard so sweet."

So on they passed, and turned about the street,
And saw the great church cast its shadow down
Upon the low roofs of the goodly town,
And yet awhile they stayed there marvelling;
But therewith heard behind them armour ring,
And turning, saw a gallant company
Going afoot, and yet most brave to see,
Come toward the church, and nigher as they drew
It was to Kiartan even as if he knew
One man among them, taller by the head
Than any there, and clad in kirtle red,
Girt with a sword, with whose gold hilt he played

With his left hand, the while his right did shade
His eyes from the bright sun that 'gainst him blazed,
As on the band of Icelanders he gazed;
Broad-shouldered was he, grand to look upon,
And in his red beard tangled was the sun
That lit his bright face up in wrathful wise,
That fiercer showed his light-grey eager eyes.
Now ere he came quite close, sidelong he bent
Unto a man who close beside him went,
Then turned, and gazed at Kiartan harder yet,
As he passed by, and therewith their eyes met,
And Kiartan's heart beat, and his face grew bright,
His eyes intent as if amidst a fight,
Yet on his lips a smile was, confident,
Devoid of hate, as by him the man went.
But Bodli said, "Let us begone ere day
Is fully passed, if even yet we may;
This is the king, and what then may we do
'Gainst such a man, a feeble folk and few?"

But Kiartan turned upon him loftily,
And said, "Abide! I do not look to die
Ere we get back to Iceland; one there is,
Thou knowst, therein, to hold through woe and bliss
My soul from its departing; go we then
And note the way of worship of these men."

So on that eve about the church they hung,
And through the open door heard fair things sung,

And sniffed the incense; then to ship they went.

But the next morn the king to Kiartan sent
To bid him come unto the royal hall,
Where nought but good to him and his should fall;
Close by the ship upon the sunny quay
Was Kiartan, when the man these words did say,
Amid a ring of Icelanders, who sat
Upon the bales of unshipped goods: with that
Kiartan stood up and said unto the man:

"Undo thy kirtle if thy worn hands can!
Show us thy neck where the king's chain has galled;
But tell us not whereby thy sire was called
Lest some of these should blush—go tell the king
That I left Iceland for another thing
Than to curse all the dead men of my race,
To make him merry—lengthen not thy face,
For thou shalt tell him therewithal, that I
Will do him service well and faithfully
As a free man may do; else let him take
What he can get of me for his God's sake."

Silence there was about him at this word,
Except that Bodli muttered in his beard:
"Now certainly a good reward we have,
In that we cast away what fortune gave,
Yet doubtless shall our names be bruited far

When we are dead—then, too, no longings are
For what we may not have."
So as he came
The man went, and e'en Kiartan now had blame
For his rash word. "What will ye, friends?" he said,
"The king is wise; his wrath will well be weighed;
He knoweth that we shall not fall for nought.
Should I speak soft?—why then should we be brought,
Unarmed belike, and helpless, one by one
Up to the bishop when the feast was done—
What, Kálf! thou say'st, aboard, and let us weigh?
Yes, and be overhauled ere end of day
By the king's longships—nay, friends, all is well;
And at the worst shall be a tale to tell
Ere all is o'er."
They hearkened, and cast fear
Aside awhile; for death had need be near
Unto such men for them to heed him aught.

So the time passed, and the king harmed them nought
And sent no message more to them, and they
Were lodged within the town, and day by day
Went here and there in peace, till Yule drew nigh.
And now folk said the feast would not pass by
Without some troubling of the ancient faith
At the king's hands, and war and ugly death
Drew round the season of the peace on earth
The angels sang of at that blessed birth.
But whoso gloomed at tidings men might snow,

It was not Kiartan; wary was he though,
And weighed men's speech well; and upon a day
He, casting up what this and that might say,
All Iceland folk into one place did call,
And when they were assembled in the hall,
Spake on this wise:
"Fair fellows, well ye know,
The saw that says, *the wise saves blow by blow;*
This king who lies so heavy on us here
Is a great man; his own folk hold him dear,
For he spares nought to them. Yet ye know well
That when his might on Hacon's fortune fell,
Great foes he left alive, and still they live.
Noble the man is; but yet who can give
Good fortune to his foe? and he must be,
Despite our goodwill, still our enemy.
I grudge it not, for noble seems the chance
The fortunes of a fair name to advance.
And so it may be, friends, that we shall free
The land this tide of the long tyranny
That Harald Fair-hair laid on it, and give
Unto all folk beneath just laws to live,
As in the old days—shortly let us go,
When time shall serve, and to king Olaf show
That death breeds death; I say not this same night,
But hold ye ever ready for the fight,
And shun the mead-horn: Yule is close anigh
And the king's folk will drink abundantly;
Then light the torch and draw the whetted sword!—

—A great man certes—yet I marked this word
Said by his bishop—many words he made
About a matter small if rightly weighed—
To die is gain—this king and I, and ye
Are young for that, yet so it well may be:
Some of us here are deemed to have done well;
How shall it be when folk our story tell
If we die grey-haired? honour fallen away,
Good faith lost, kindness perished—for a day
Of little pleasure mingled with great pain—
So will we not unto the Gods complain
Or draw our mouths awry with foolish hate,
This king and I, if 'neath the hand of fate
Sword to sword yet we meet: hearken once more—
It seems the master of this new-found lore
Said to his men once, *Think ye that I bring
Peace upon earth? nay but a sword*—O king,
Behold the sword ready to meet thy sword!"

Out sprang his bright steel at that latest word,
And bright the weapons glittered round about,
And the roof shook again beneath their shout;
But only Bodli, silent, pensive, stood,
As though he heeded nought of bad or good
In word or deed. But Kiartan, flushed and glad,
Noted him not, for whatso thought he had,
He deemed him ever ready in the end
To follow after as himself should wend.
Howso that was, now were these men at one,

That e'en as Kiartan bade it should be done,
And the king set on, ere on them he fell;
So then to meat they gat and feasted well;
But the next morn espial should be made
How best to do the thing that Kiartan bade.

The next morn came, and other news withal,
For by a messenger the king did call
The Icelanders to council in his house,
Bidding them note, that howso valorous
They might be, still but little doubt there was
That lightly he might bring their end to pass
If need should drive him thereto. "Yet," said he,
"Fain would I give you peace, though certainly
This tide but one of two things must ye choose,
Either nought else but life itself to lose,
Or else to come and hearken to my words
In the great hall whereas I see my lords."

Kiartan gazed round about when this was said,
Smiling beneath a frown, his face flushed red
With wrath and shame. "Well," said he, "we are caught—
The sluggards' counsel morning brings to nought.
What say ye, shall we hold the feast at home?
Hearken, the guests get ready! shall they come?"

For as he spake upon the wind was borne
Unto their ears the blast of a great horn,

And smiled the messenger, and therewithal
Down from the minster roar of bells did fall,
Rung back and clashing; thereon Bodli spake:

"Thou and I, cousin, for our honour's sake,
May be content to die; but what of these?
Thy part it is to bring us unto peace
If it may be; then, if the worst befall,
There can we die too, as in Atli's Hall
The Niblungs fell; nor worser will it sound
That thus it was, when we are underground,
And over there our Gudrun hears the tale."

Silent sat Kiartan, gazing on the pale
Set face of Bodli for a while, then turned
Unto his silent folk, and saw they yearned
For one chance more of life.

"Go, man," he said,
"And tell thy king his will shall be obeyed
So far as this, that we will come to him;
But bid him guard with steel, head, breast, and limb,
Since as we come, belike, we shall not go,
And who the end of words begun can know?
Ho, friends! do on your war-gear! Fear ye not,
Since two good things to choose from have ye got:
Peace, or a famed death!"

Then with both his ears
Ringing with clink of mail and clash of spears

The messenger went forth upon his way;
And the king knew by spies, the wise ones say,
What counsel Kiartan gave his folk that eve,
And had no will in such great hands to leave
His chance of life or death. Now, armed at last,
The men of Iceland up the long street passed,
And saw few men there; wives and children stood
Before the doors to gaze, or in his hood
An elder muttered, as they passed him by,
Or sad-eyed maids looked on them longingly.
So came they to the great hall of the king,
And round about the door there stood a ring
Of tall men armed, and each a dreaded name;
These opened to them as anigh they came,
And then again drew close, and hemmed them in,
Nor spared they speech or laughter, and the din
Was great among them as all silently
The men of Herdholt passed the door-posts by.
Then through the hall's dusk Kiartan gazed, and saw
Small space whereby his company might draw
Nigh to the king, for there so thick men stood
That their tall spears were like a wizard's wood.
Now some way from the daïs must they stand
Where sat the king, and close to his right hand
The German bishop, but no heed at all
The king gave to our folk, as down the hall
His marshal cried for silence, and the din
Being quite appeased, in a clear voice and thin
The holy man 'gan to set forth the faith;

But for these men brought nigh the gate of Death,
Hard was it now to weigh the right and wrong
Of what he said, that seemed both dull and long.
So when at last he came unto an end,
Uprose the king, and o'er the place did send
A mighty voice: "Now have ye heard the faith,
And what the High God through his servant saith;
This is my faith: what say ye to it, then?"

Uprose a great shout from King Olaf's men,
And clash of tossing spears, and Bodli set
His hand upon his sword, while Kiartan yet
Stood still, and, smiling, eyed the king: and he
Turned on him as the din fell:

"What say ye,
What say ye, Icelanders? thou specially?
I call thee yet a year too young to die,
Son of my namesake; neither seem'st thou such
As who would trust in Odin overmuch,
Or pray long prayers to Thor, while yet thy sword
Hangs by thy side."

Now at the king's first word
Down Kiartan stooped, and 'gan his shoe to lace,
And a dumb growl went through the crowded place
Like the far thunder while the sky is bright;
But when he rose again and stood upright
The king cried out:

"Which man of these is he

Who counselled you to slay no man but me
Amid my guards?"
Kiartan stood forth a space;
And said: "E'en so, O king, thou biddst him face
Of his own will, the thing that all men fear,
Swift death and certain—king, the man is here,
And in his own land, Kiartan Olafson
Men called him—pity that his days are done,
For fair maids loved him."
As he said the word
From out its sheath flamed forth the rover's sword,
And Bodli was beside him, and the hall
Was filled with fury now from wall to wall,
And back to back now stood the Herdholt band,
Each with his weapon gleaming in his hand.

Then o'er the clamour was the king's voice heard;
"Peace, men of mine, too quickly are ye stirred!
Do ye not see how that this man and I
Alone of men still let our sharp swords lie
Within their sheaths? Wise is the man to know
How troublous things among great men will go.
Speak, Kiartan Olafson! I offer thee
That in my court here thou abide with me,
Keeping what faith thou wilt; but let me deal
To these thy fellows either bane or weal,
As they shall do my bidding."
"Kinglike then,"
Said Kiartan, "dost thou speak about these men;

Yea, like a fool, who knowest not the earth,
And what things thereon bring us woe or mirth;
No man there is of these but calls me friend;
Yea, and if all truth but this truth should end,
And sire, and love, and all were false to me,
Still should I look on my right hand to see
Bodli the son of Thorleik—Come, then, death,
Thy yokefellow am I."

Then from his sheath
Outsprang his sword, and even therewithal
Clear rang the Iceland shout amidst the hall,
And in a short space had the tale been o'er,
But therewith Olaf stilled the noise once more,
And smiling said;

"Thou growest angry, man!
Content thee, thou it was the strife began,
And now thou hast the best of it; come, then,
And sit beside me; thou and thy good men
Shall go in peace—only, bethink thee how
In idle poet's lies thou needst must trow—
Make no delay to take me by the hand,
Not meet it is that 'neath me thou shouldst stand."

To Kiartan's face, pale erst with death, there rose
A sudden flush, and then his lips, set close,
And knitted brow, grew soft, and in his eyes
There came at first a look of great surprise,
Then kind they grew, and with shamefaced smile
He looked upon the king a little while,

Then slowly sank his sword, and, taking it
By the sharp point, to where the king did sit
He made his way, and said:

"Nay, thou hast won;
Do thou for me what no man yet has done,
And take my sword, and leave me weaponless:
And if thy Christ is one who e'en can bless
An earthly man, or heed him aught at all,
On me too let his love and blessing fall;
But if nor Christ, nor Odin help, why, then
Still at the worst are we the sons of men,
And will we, will we not, yet must we hope,
And after unknown happiness must grope,
Since the known fails us, as the elders say;
Though sooth, for me, who know no evil day,
Are all these things but words."

"Put back thy blade,"
The king said, "thereof may I be apaid,
With thee to wield it for me; and now, come,
Deem of my land and house e'en as thy home,
For surely now I know that this thy smile
The heart from man or maid can well beguile."

As the king spake, drew Bodli nigh the place,
And a strange look withal there crossed his face;
It seemed he waited as a man in dread
What next should come; but little Kiartan said
Save thanks unto the king, and gayer now
Than men had seen him yet, he 'gan to grow.

Then gave the king command, and presently
All strife was swallowed of festivity,
And in all joyance the time slipped away,
And a fair ending crowned a troublous day.

Great love there grew 'twixt Kiartan and the king
From that time forth, and many a noble thing
Was planned betwixt them; and ere Yule was o'er
White raiment in the Minster, Kiartan bore,
And he and his were hallowed at the font.

Now so I deem it is, that use and wont,
The lords of men, the masks of many a face,
Raising the base perchance, somewhat abase
Those that are wise and noble; even so
O'er Kiartan's head as day by day did go,
Worthier the king's court, and its ways 'gan seem
Than many a thing whereof he erst did dream,
And gay he grew beyond the wont of men.
Now with the king dwelt Ingibiorg as then,
His sister; unwed was she, fair of face,
Beloved and wise, not lacking any grace
Of mind or body: Often it befell
That she and Kiartan met, and more than well
She 'gan to love him; and he let her love,
Saying withal, that nought at all might move
His heart from Gudrun; and for very sooth
He might have held that word; but yet for ruth,
And a soft pleasure that he would not name

All unrebuked he let her soft eyes claim
Kindness from his; and surely to the king
This love of theirs seemed a most happy thing.
And to himself he promised merry days,
And had in heart so Kiartan's state to raise
That he should be a king too.
But meanwhile,
Silent would Bodli go, without a smile
Upon his sad changed face from morn to eve;
And often now the thronged hall would he leave
To wander by the borders of the sea,
Waiting, half dreading, till some news should free
The band of Icelanders; most wearily
Month after month to him the days dragged by.

For ye shall know that the king looked for news
Whether the folk of Iceland would refuse,
At the priest Thangbrand's word, to change their faith
A man of violence, the story saith,
A lecher, and a manslayer—tidings came
While yet the summer at its height did flame,
And Thangbrand brought it; little could he do,
Although indeed two swordsmen stout he slew.
Unto the holy faith folk's hearts to turn.
Hall of the Side, as in the tale we learn,
Gizur the White, and Hialti Skeggison,
With some few others, to the faith were won,
The most of men little these things would heed,
And some were furious heathens; so, indeed,

To save his life he had to flee away.
  Wroth was the king hereat, and now would stay
The Iceland ships from sailing; little fain
Was Kiartan yet to get him back again,
Since he, forgetting not the former days—
It might be—passed his life fulfilled of praise,
And love, and glory. So the time went on,
Gizur the White and Hialti Skeggison,
Fleeing from Iceland, in the autumn-tide
Came out to Norway with the king to bide
Until the summer came, when they should go
Once more the truth of Christ's fair lore to show.
Long ago now of Gudrun and her ways,
And of the coming of those happy days
That were to be, had Kiartan ceased to speak
Unto his friend; who sullen now and weak,
Weary with waiting, faint with holding back
He scarcely knew from what, did surely lack
Some change of days if yet he was to live.
Tidings the new comers to him did give
From Laxdale, speaking lightly of the thing
That like a red-hot iron hand did wring
His weary heart; Gudrun was fair and well,
And still at Bathstead in good hope did dwell
Of Kiartan's swift return. That word or two,
That name, wrought in him, that at last he knew
His longing, and intent; and desolate
The passing of the days did he await,
Torn by remorse, tortured by fear, lest yet

Kiartan the lapse of strange days should forget,
And take to heart the old familiar days,
And once more turn him to the bygone ways
Where they were happy—but his fear was vain,
For if his friend of Iceland had been fain
Scarce had he gone; the king would keep him ther
A pledge with other three, till he should hear
What thing the Icelanders this time would do,
Nor, as we said, had he good will to go
Whatso his power was: for so fair things went
With Ingibiorg, that folk with one consent
Named her his bride that was to be, and said,
That sure a nobler pair were never wed.

And so the time passed, till the day came round
When at the quay the ships lay Iceland-bound,
And Bodli went to bid his friend farewell,
Flushed and bright-eyed, for wild hope, sooth to tell,
Had striven with shame, and cast its light on love,
Until a fairer sky there seemed above,
A fairer earth about, and still most fair
The fresh green sea that was to bring him there,
Whereon his heart was set.
"O gay! O gay!"
Said Kiartan, "thou art glad to go away;
This is the best face I have seen on thee
Since first our black oars smote the Burgfirth sea."

But as he spake a dark flush and a frown

Swallowed up Bodli's smile ; he cast adown
His eager eyes · "Thou art as glad to stay,
Belike," he said, "as I to go away.
What thinkest thou I plot against thee then?"

"Thou art the strangest of the sons of men,"
Said Kiartan, with a puzzled look. "Come now,
Leave off thy riddles, clear thy troubled brow,
And let me think of thee as in time past,
When ever a most merry lad thou wast!
Why talkest thou of plotting? True and leal
I deem thee ever as the well-tried steel
That hangs beside thee ; neither cross at all
Our fond desires. Though whatso thing may fall
Still shall I trust thee."

His own face grew grave
As o'er his heart there swept a sudden wave
Of the old thoughts. But Bodli said, "O friend,
Forgive my face fair looks and foul ; I wend
Back to our kin and land, that gladdens me.
I leave thee here behind across the sea,
That makes me sad and sour."

He did not raise
His eyes up midst his words, or meet the gaze
Kiartan bent on him, till again he said :
"Olaf shall hear of all the goodlihead
Thou gainest here. Thy brethren shall be glad
That thou such honour from all men hast had.

Oswif the Wise no doubt I soon shall see—
What shall I say to him?"
Then steadily
Gazed Kiartan on him. "Tell Gudrun all this
Thou knowest of, my honour and my bliss;
Say we shall meet again!"
No more they spake,
But kissed and parted; either's heart did ache
A little while with thought of the old days;
Then Bodli to the future turned his gaze,
Unhappy and remorseful, knowing well
How ill his life should go whate'er befell.
But Kiartan, left behind, being such a man
As through all turns of fortune never can
Hold truce with fear or sorrow, lived his life
Not ill content with all the change and strife.

Fair goes the ship that beareth out Christ's truth,
Mingled of hope, of sorrow, and of ruth,
And on the prow Bodli the Christian stands,
Sunk deep in thought of all the many lands
The world holds, and the folk that dwell therein,
And wondering why that grief and rage and sin
Was ever wrought; but wondering most of all
Why such wild passion on his heart should fall.

Bodli brings Tidings to Bathstead.

NOW so it chanced, on a late summer day,
Unto the west would Oswif take his way
With all his sons, and Gudrun listlessly
Stood by the door their going forth to see,
Until the hill's brow hid them; then she turned,
And long she gazed, the while her full heart yearned
Toward Herdholt and the south.
"Late grows the year,"
She said, "and winter cometh with its fear
And dreams of dying hopes Ah me, I change,
And my heart hardens! Will he think me strange
When he beholds this face of mine at last,
Or shall our love make nought of long days past,
Burn up the sights that we apart have seen,
And make them all as though they had not been?
Ah, the hard world! I, who in hope so sure
Have waited, scarcely may the days endure.
How has it been with those who needs must wait
With dying hope and lingering love, till hate,
The seed of ill lies, told and hearkened to,
The knot of loving memories shall undo,
Break the last bonds of love, and cast them forth
With nothing left to them of joy or worth?
"O love, come back, come back, delay no more
To ease thine aching heart that yearneth sore
For me, as mine for thee! Leave wealth and praise

For those to win who know no happy days.
Come, though so true thou art, thou fearest not
Yet to delay! Come, my heart waxes hot
For all thy lonely days to comfort thee."

So spake she, and awhile stood quietly,
Still looking toward the south, her wide grey eyes
Made tenderer with those thronging memories,
Until upon the wind she seemed to hear
The sound of horse-hoofs, and 'twixt hope and fear
She trembled, as more clear the far sounds grew,
And thitherward it seemed from Herdholt drew;
So now at last to meet that sound she went,
Until her eyes, on the hill's brow intent,
Beheld a spear rising against the sky
O'er the grey road, and therewith presently
A gilded helm rose up beneath the spear,
And then her trembling limbs no more might bear
Her body forward; scarce alive she stood,
And saw a man in raiment red as blood
Rise o'er the hill's brow, who when he did gain
The highest part of the grey road, drew rein
To gaze on Bathstead spreading 'neath him there,
Its bright vanes glittering in the morning air.
She stared upon him panting, and belike
He saw her now, for he his spurs did strike
Into his horse, and, while her quivering face
Grew hard and stern, rode swiftly to the place
Whereas she stood, and clattering leapt adown

Unto the earth, and met her troubled frown
And pale face, with the sad imploring eyes
Of Bodli Thorleikson.
Then did there rise
A dreadful fear within her heart, for she
No look like that in him was wont to see;
Scarce had she strength to say:
"How goes it then,
With him—thy kinsman, mid the Eastland men?"

Then, writhen as with some great sudden sting
Of pain, he spake; "Fear not, Gudrun, I bring
Fair news of his well-doing—he is well."

"Speak out," she said, "what more there is to tell!
Is he at Herdholt? will he come to-day?"

And with that word she turned her face away,
Shamed with the bitter-sweet of yearning pain,
And to her lips the red blood came again;
But he a moment made as he would reach
His hand to hers, his sad eyes did beseech
Some look from hers, so blind to him, so blind!
And scarce his story might he call to mind,
Until he deemed he saw her shoulders heave
As with a sob.
Then said he, "We did leave
Kiartan in Norway, praised of all men there;
He bade me tell thee that his life was fair
And full of hope—and that he looked to see

Thy face again.—So God be good to me,
These were the words he spake!"

For now she turned
Tearless upon him, and great anger burned
Within her eyes: "O trusty messenger,
No doubt through thee his very voice I hear!
Sure but light thought and stammering voice he had
To waste on one, who used to make him glad!
Thou art a true friend! Ah, I know thee, then,
A follower on the footsteps of great men,
To reap where they have sowed. Alive and well!
And doing deeds whereof the skalds shall tell!
Ah, what fair days he heapeth up for me!
Come now, unless thine envy stayeth thee,
Speak more of him, and make me glad at heart!"

Then Bodli said, "Nay, I have done my part,
Let others tell the rest"—and turned to go,
Yet lingered, and she cried aloud:

"No, no,
Friend of my lover! if ill words I spake
Yet pardon me! for sore my heart doth ache
With pent-up love."

She reached her hand to him,
He turned and took it, and his eyes did swim
With tears for him and her; a while it seemed,
As though the dream so many a sweet night dreamed
Waked from with anguish on so many a morn,
Were come to pass, that he afresh was born

To happy life, with heavens and earth made new;
But slowly from his grasp her hand she drew,
And stepped aback, and said:
"Speak, I fear not,
Because so true a heart my love hath got
That nought can change it; speak, when cometh he?
Tell me the sweet words that he spake of me,
Did he not tell me in the days agone,
That oft he spake of me to thee alone?
Nay, tell me of his doings, for indeed
Of words 'twixt him and me is little need."

Then Bodli 'gan in troubled voice to tell
True tidings of the things that there befell,
Saving of Ingibiorg, and Gudrun stood
And hearkened, trembling:
"Good, yea, very good,"
She said, when he had done, "and yet I deem
All this thou say'st as if we dreamed a dream;
Nor cam'st thou here to say but this to me—
Why tarrieth Kiartan yet beyond the sea?"

Bodli flushed red, and, trembling sorely, spake:
"O Gudrun, must thou die for one man's sake,
So heavenly as thou art? What shall I say?
Thou mayst live long, yet never see the day
That bringeth Kiartan back unto this land."

He looked at her, but moveless did she stand,
Nor spake a word, nor yet did any pain

Writhe her fair face, grown deadly pale again.
Then Bodli stretched his hand forth;
"Yet they lie,
Who say I did the thing, who say that I,
E'en in my inmost heart, have wished for it.
But thou—O, hearken, Gudrun—he doth sit
By Ingibiorg's side ever; day by day,
Sadder his eyes grow when she goes away—
What! know I not the eyes of lovers then?—
Why should I tell thee of the talk of men,
Babbling of how he weds her, is made king,
How he and Olaf shall have might to bring
Denmark and England both beneath their rule.
—Ah, woe, woe, woe, that I, a bitter fool,
Upon one heart all happy life should stake;
Woe is me, Gudrun, for thy beauty's sake!
Ah, for my fool's eyes and my greedy heart
Must all rest henceforth from my soul depart?"

He reached his hand to her, she put it by,
And gathered up her gown-skirts hurriedly,
And in a voice, like a low wailing wind,
Unto the wind she cried:
"Still may he find
A woman worthy of his loveliness;
Still may it be that she his days will bless,
As I had done, had we been wed at last!"

Therewith by Bodli's trembling hands she passed,

Nor gave one look on him; but he gazed still,
E'en when her gown fluttered far down the hill,
With staring eyes upon the empty place
Where last he saw the horror of her face
Changed by consuming anguish; when he turned,
Blind with the fire that in his worn heart burned,
Empty the hill-side was of anyone,
And as a man who some great crime hath done
He gat into his saddle, and scarce knew
Whither he went, until his rein he drew
By Herdholt porch, as in the other days,
When Kiartan by his side his love would praise.

Three days at Herdholt in most black despair
Did Bodli sit, till folk 'gan whisper there
That the faith-changer on the earth was dead,
Although he seemed to live; with mighty dread
They watched his going out and coming in;
On the fourth day somewhat did hope begin
To deal, as its wont is, with agony;
And he, who truly at the first could see
What dreadful things his coming days did wait,
Now, blinded by the hand of mocking fate,
Deeming that good from evil yet might rise,
Once more to pleasure lifted up his eyes.

And now, to nurse his hope, there came that day
A messenger from Gudrun, who did pray
That he would straightly come and see her there.
At whose mazed face a long while did he stare

As one who heard not, and the man must speak
His message thrice, before a smile 'gan break
Over his wan face; neither did he say
A word in answer, but straight took his way
O'er rough and smooth to Bathstead, knowing not
What ground his horse beneath his hoofs had got.

Ah, did he look for pleasure, when he saw
Her long slim figure down the dusk hall draw
Unto his beating heart, as nobly clad
As in the days when all the three were glad?
Did he perchance deem that he might forget
The man across the sea? His eyes were wet
For pity of that heart so made forlorn,
But on his lips a smile, of pleasure born,
Played, that I deem perchance he knew not of,
As he reached out his hand to touch his love
Long ere she drew anigh. But now, when she
Was close to him, and therewith eagerly,
Trembling and wild-eyed, he beheld the face
He deemed e'en then would gladden all the place,
Blank grew his heart, and all hope failed in him,
And e'en the anguish of his love grew dim,
And poor it seemed, a thing of little price,
Before the gathered sorrow of her eyes.

But while, still trembling there, the poor wretch stood,
She spoke in a low voice that chilled his blood,
So worn and far away it seemed; "See now,

I sent for thee, who of all men dost know
The heart of him who once swore troth to me:
Kiartan, I mean, the son of Olaf, he
Who o'er the sea wins great fame as thou say'st—
That thou mayst tell again, why he doth waste
The tale of happy days that we shall have;
For death comes quickly on us, and the grave
Is a dim land whereof I know not aught."

As a grey dove, within the meshes caught,
Flutters a little, then lies still again
Ere wildly beat its wings with its last pain,
So once or twice her passion, as she spake,
Rose to her throat, and yet might not outbreak
Till that last word was spoken; then as stung
By pain on pain, her arms abroad she flung,
And wailed aloud; but dry-eyed Bodli stood
Pale as a corpse, and in such haggard mood,
Such helpless, hopeless misery, as one
Who first in hell meets her he hath undone.
Yet sank her wailing in a little while,
Through dreadful sobs to silence, and a smile,
A feeble memory of the courteous ways,
For which in days agone she won such praise,
Rose to her pale lips, and she spake once more
As if the passionate words, cast forth before,
Were clean forgotten, with that bitter wail:

"O, Bodli Thorleikson, of good avail

Thou ever art to me, and now hast come
Swiftly indeed unto a troubled home:
For ill at ease I am, and fain would hear
From thee who knowst him, why this looked-for year
Lacks Kiartan still."

He knew not what to say,
But she reached out her hand in the old way
And coldly palm met palm: then him she led
Unto a seat, and sat by him, and said:

'Yea, fain am I to hear the tale once more,
The shame and grief, although it hurt me sore;
Yea, from thee, Bodli; though it well may be
That he I trusted, too much trusted thee."

So great a burden on his spirit lay
He heeded not the last words she did say,
But in low measured speech began again
The story of the honour and the gain
That Kiartan had, and how his days went now;
She sat beside him, with her head bent low,
Hearkening, or hearkening not; but now when all
Was done, and he sat staring at the wall
Silent, and full of misery, then she said:

"How know I yet but thou the tale hast made,
Since many a moment do I think of now
In the old time before ye went, when thou
Wouldst look on me, as on him I should gaze

If he were here, false to the happy days?"

"A small thing," said he, "shall I strive with fate
In vain, or vainly pray against thy hate?
Would God I were a liar! that his keel
E'en now the sands of White-river did feel.
O Gudrun, Gudrun, thou shalt find it true!
Ah, God, what thing is left for me to do?"

Therewith he rose, and towards the hall-door went,
Nor heard her voice behind him, as she bent
O'er the tear-wetted rushes of the floor.
Sick-hearted was he when he passed the door,
Weary of all things, weary of his love,
And muttering to himself hard things thereof;
But when he reached the Herdholt porch again,
A heaven long left seemed that morn's bitter pain.
And one desire alone he had, that he
Once more anigh unto his love might be;
Honour and shame, truth, lies, and weal and woe,
Seemed idle words whose meaning none might know,
What was the world to him with all its ways,
If he once more into her eyes might gaze?
Again he saw her, not alone this tide,
But in the hall, her father by her side,
And many folk around: if like a dream
All things except her loveliness did seem,
Yet doubt ye not that evil shades they were;
A dream most horrible for him to bear,

That all his strength was fallen to weakness now,
That he the sweet repose might never know
Of being with her from all the world apart,
Eyes watching eyes, heart beating unto heart.
Cold was her face, not pensive as before,
And like a very queen herself she bore
Among the guests, and courteous was to all,
But no kind look on Bodli's face did fall,
Though he had died to gain it.

So time wore,
And still he went to Bathstead more and more,
And whiles alone, and whiles in company,
With raging heart her sad face did he see,
And still the time he spent in hall and bower
Beside her did he call the evillest hour
Of all the day, the while it dured; but when
He was away, came hope's ghost back again
And fanned his miserable longing, till
He said within himself that nought was ill
Save that most hideous load of loneliness.
Howso the time went, never rest did bless
His heart a moment; nought seemed good to him,
Not e'en the rest of death, unknown and dim.

And Kiartan came not, and what news came out
From Norway was a gravestone on such doubt
As yet might linger in the hearts of men,
That he perchance might see that land again.
And no more now spake Gudrun any word

Of Kiartan, until folk with one accord
Began to say, how that no little thing
It was, those two great strains of men to bring
Into alliance: "Pity though!" they said,
"That she to such a strange man should be wed
As Bodli Thorleikson of late hath grown!"

So sprung the evil crop by evil sown.

Kiartan's Farewell to Norway.

MEANWHILE to Kiartan far across the sea,
Unto all seeming, life went merrily;
Yet none the less the lapse of days would bring
Unto his frank heart something of a sting,
And Bodli's sad departing face and word,
Not wholly thrust out from his memory, stirred
Doubts of the changing days in Kiartan's mind,
And scarce amid his joyance might he find
The happy days he ever looked to have,
Till he were lying silent in his grave.
And somewhat more distraught now would he take
The gentle words that the king's sister spake,
And look into her eyes less fervently,
And less forget the world when she drew nigh,
And start and look around as her soft hand
Fell upon his, as though a ghost did stand
Anigh him, and he feared to hear it speak.
And Ingibiorg for her part, grown too weak

Against the love she had for him to strive,
Yet knew no less whither the days did drive
Her wasted life; and, seeing him as oft
As she might do, and speaking sweet and soft,
When they twain were together: smiling, too,
Though fast away the lovesome time did go,
Wept long through lonely hours, nor cast away
From out her heart thought of the coming day,
When all should be as it had never been,
And the wild sea should roll its waves between
His grey eyes and her weary useless tears.

But while she brooded o'er the coming years
Empty of love, and snatched what joy there was
Yet left to her, great tidings came to pass;
For late the summer after Bodli sailed,
News came, that now at last had Christ prevailed
In Iceland; that the Hill of Laws had heard
Sung through the clear air many a threatening word,
And seen the weapons gather for the fight;
Till Snorri's wiles, Hall's wisdom, Gizur's might,
And fears of many men, and wavering doubt
On the worse side, had brought it so about
That now Christ's faith was law to everyone:
The learned say, a thousand years agone
Since the cold shepherds in the winter night
Beheld and heard the angels' fresh delight.

King Olaf's heart swelled at such news as these,
Straightway he sent for the four hostages,

And bade them with good gifts to go their ways
If so they would; or stay and gather praise
And plenteous honour there; and as he spake
He glanced at Kiartan, and a smile did break
Across his kingly face, as who would say,
"Thou at the least wilt scarcely go away."
But Kiartan answered not the smile, but stood
Grave with deep thought, and troubled in his mood,
Until he saw his fellows looked that he
Should speak for all; then said he presently:

"Thanks have thou, King, for all that thou hast done
To us, and the great honour I have won
At thine hands here; yet be not angry, King,
If still we thank thee most for this one thing,
That here thou stay'st us not against our will;
Thicker is blood than water, say I still;
This is the third year since I left my kin
And land—and other things that dwell therein."

The king's face fell, and in sharp words and few
He answered: "Well, a gift I gave to you;
And will not take it back—Go, Kiartan, then,
And, if thou canst, find kinder, truer men,
And lovelier maids in thy land than in this!"

But Kiartan said, "King, take it not amiss!
Thou knowest I have ever said to thee,
That I must one day go across the sea;
Belike I shall come back upon a tide,

And show thee such a wonder of a bride
As earth holds not, nay nor the heavens, I deem."

"God send thee a good ending to thy dream;
Yet my heart cries that if thou goest from me,
Thy pleasant face I never more shall see;
Be merry then, while fate will have it so!"

So therewith unto high feast did they go,
And by the king sat Kiartan, and the day
'Twixt merry words and sad thoughts wore away.

Now were the ships got ready, and the wares
Drawn for long months past from the upland fairs
Were laid ashipboard. Kálf was skipper still
Of Kiartan's ship, for never had he will
To leave his side. Now restless Kiartan was,
And longed full sore for these last days to pass,
For in his heart there lurked a spark of fear,
Nor any word of Gudrun might he hear
From those who brought the news of change of faith,
Since nigh the fleet they dwelt, my story saith,
In the south country, and knew nought at all
Of what in Laxdale late had chanced to fall.

Now by their bridges lay the laden ships,
And he now at the last must see the lips
Of Ingibiorg grow pale with their farewell;
And sick at heart he grew, for, sooth to tell,
He feared her sorrow much, and furthermore

He loved her with a strange love very sore,
Despite the past and future. So he went
Sad-eyed amid the hall's loud merriment
Unto her bower on that last morn of all

Alone she was, her head against the wall
Had fallen, her heavy eyes were shut when he
Stood on the threshold; she rose quietly,
Hearing the clash of arms, and took his hand,
And thus with quivering lips awhile did stand
Regarding him · but he made little show
Of manliness, but let the hot tears flow
Fast o'er his cheeks. At last she spake:

"Weep then!
If thou who art the kindest of all men
Must sorrow for me, yet more glad were I
To see thee leave my bower joyfully
This last time, that when o'er thee sorrow came,
And thought of me therewith, thou mightst not blame
My little love for ever saddening thee.
Love!—let me say love once—great shalt thou be,
Beloved of all, and dying ne'er forgot.
Farewell! farewell! farewell! and think thou not
That in my heart there lingers any hate
Of her who through these years for thee did wait,
A weary waiting—three long, long, long years,
Well over now; nay when of me she hears,
Fain were I she should hate me not. Behold,
Here is a coif, well wrought of silk and gold

By folk of Micklegarth, who had no thought
Of thee or me, and thence by merchants brought
Who perchance loved not. Is Gudrun too fair
To take this thing, a queen might long to wear?
Upon the day when on the bench ye sit,
Hand held in hand, crown her fair-head with it,
And tell her whence thou hadst it. Ah, farewell,
Lest of mine eyes thou shouldst have worse to tell
Than now thou hast!"
Therewith she turned from him
And took the coif, wherein the gold was dim
With changing silken threads, the linen white
Scarce seen amid the silk and gold delight.
With hands that trembled little did she fold
The precious thing, and set its weight of gold
Within a silken bag; and then to his
She reached her hands, and in one bitter kiss
Tasted his tears, while a great wave of thought
Of what sweet things the changed years might have brought
Swept over her—and then she knew him gone,
And yet for all that scarcely felt more lone
Than for a many days past she had felt.
So with fixed eyes she drew into her belt
Her kirtle, and to this and that thing turned
With heart that ever for the long rest yearned.

Bearing that gift, but heeding not what thing
He had with him, came Kiartan to the king,

Who in the porch abode him, his great men
Standing around; then said he:
"Welcome then
This last day that I see thee; go we forth,
Fair lords, and see his ship's head greet the north,
For seldom from the north shall any come
Like unto him to greet us in our home."

So forth they went, and all the Iceland men
Gat them aboard, and skipper Kálf by then
Stood midway on the last bridge, while the king
'Gan say to Kiartan:
"Many a treasured thing
Had I laid down, O friend, to keep thee here,
But since the old thing still must be more dear
Than the new thing, to such men as thou art,
Now, with my goodwill, to thy love depart,
And leave me here the coming woes to meet
Without thee. May thy life be fair and sweet,
Nor yet drag on till present days are nought,
And all the past days a tormenting thought!
Take this last gift of me; a noble sword,
Which if thou dost according to my word,
Shall never leave thy side; for who can know
Ere all is o'er, how madly things may go?"

So Kiartan took the sword, and thanked the king,
With no light heart, for that and everything
That at his hands he had, and therewith crossed

The gangway; shoreward were the hawsers tossed,
The long sweeps smote the water, and the crew
Shouted their last farewell; the white sail drew,
'Twixt Norway and the stern, swept in the sea.

There stood the king, and long time earnestly
Looked on the lessening ship; then said at last,
As o'er his knitted brow his hand he passed:
"Go thy ways, Kiartan; great thou art indeed,
And great thy kin are, nathless shalt thou need
Stout heart enough to meet what waiteth thee
If aught mine eyes of things to come may see."

Kiartan back in Iceland; Refna comes into the Tale.

KIARTAN and Kálf in Burgfirth came aland
And raised their tents anigh unto the strand,
As in the summer-tide the fashion was
Of mariners, the while the news did pass
That they were come out, through the country-side,
And there awhile that summer would abide.
Now when to Herdholt did that tidings come,
Olaf and all his sons were gone from home:
So Kiartan saw them not at first, among
The folk that to the newcomers did throng;
Amidst the first of whom, he, none the less,

Noted his friend Gudmund of Asbiornsness,
Who to his sister Thurid now was wed,
And brought her with him; with all goodlihead
He greeted them, yet Kiartan deemed that they
Looked on him strangely; on the self-same day
Kálf's father, Asgeir, came, and brought with him
Refna, his daughter, fair of face and limb,
Dark haired, great-eyed, and gentle: timidly
She gazed at Kiartan as he drew anigh
And gave her welcome.

Now as he began
To ask them news of this and that good man,
And how he fared, Thurid with anxious face
Came up to him, and drew him from the place,
Saying, "Come, talk with me apart awhile!"
He followed after with a puzzled smile,
Yet his heart felt as something ill drew near.
So, when they came where none their speech might hear,
Thurid turned round about on him, and said,
"Brother, amidst thy speech, I shook with dread
Lest Gudrun's name from out thy lips should burst;
How was it then thou spak'st not of her first?"

Then Kiartan, trembling, said, "Indeed, I thought
That news of ill unasked would soon be brought—
Sister, what ails thee then—is my love dead?"

"Nay," Thurid stammered, "she is well—and wed."

"What!" cried out Kiartan, "and the Peacock's
house?
I used to deem my brothers valorous,
My father a great man—and Bodli's sword,
Where was it midst this shame?"
Scarce was the word
Out of his lips, ere, looking on her face,
He turned and staggered wildly from the place,
Crying aloud, "O blind, O blind, O blind!
Where is the world I used to deem so kind,
So loving to me? O Gudrun, Gudrun,
Here I come back with all the honour won
We talked of, that thou saidst thou knewest well
Was but for thee—to whom then shall I tell
The tale of that well-doing? And thou, friend,
How might I deem that aught but death should end
Our love together? yea, and even now,
How shall I learn to hate thee, friend, though thou
Art changed into a shadow and a lie?
O ill day of my birth, ill earth and sky,
Why was I then bemocked with days of bliss
If still the ending of them must be this?
O wretch, that once wast happy, days a-gone,
Before thou wert so wretched and alone,
How on unhappy faces wouldst thou look
And scarce with scorn and ruth their sorrow brook.
Now then at last thou knowest of the earth,
And why the elders look askance on mirth."

Some paces had he gone from where she stood,
Gazing in terror on his hapless mood,
And now she called his name; he turned about,
And far away he heard the shipmen's shout
And beat of the sea, and from the down there came
The bleat of ewes; and all these, and his name,
And the sights too, the green down 'neath the sun,
The white strand and the far-off hill-sides dun,
And white birds wheeling, well-known things did seem,
But pictures now or figures in a dream,
With all their meaning lost. Yet therewithal
On his vexed spirit did the new thought fall
How weak and helpless and alone he was.
Then gently to his sister did he pass,
And spake:
"Now is the world clean changed for me
In this last minute, yet indeed I see
That still will it go on for all my pain;
Come then, my sister, let us back again;
I must meet folk, and face the life beyond,
And, as I may, walk 'neath the dreadful bond
Of ugly pain—such men our fathers were,
Not lightly bowed by any weight of care."

She smiled upon him kindly, and they went
And found folk gathered in the biggest tent,
And busied o'er the wares, and gay enow
In outward seeming; though ye well may know
Folk dreaded much for all the country's sake

In what wise Kiartan this ill news would take.
Now Kálf had brought the gayest things to show
The women-folk, and by a bale knelt now
That Kiartan knew right well, and close by him
Sat Refna, with her dainty hand and slim
Laid on a broidered bag, her fair head crowned
With that rich coif thereafter so renowned
In Northland story. As he entered there
She raised to him her deep grey eyes, and fair
Half-opened mouth, and blushed blood-red therewith;
And inwardly indeed did Kiartan writhe
With bitter anguish as his eyes did meet
Her bright-flushed gentle face so pure and sweet;
And he thenceforth to have no lot or part
In such fair things; yet struggling with his heart
He smiled upon her kindly. Pale she grew
When the flush passed, as though in sooth she knew
What sickness ailed him.

"Be not wroth," she said,
"That I have got this queen's gift on my head,
I bade them do it not."

Then wearily
He answered: "Surely it beseemeth thee
Right well, and they who set it there did right.
Rich were the man who owned the maiden bright,
And the bright coif together!"

As he spake
Wandered his eyes; so sore his heart did ache
That not for long those matters might he note;

Yet a glad flush again dyed face and throat
Of Refna, and she said, "So great and famed,
So fair and kind! where shall the maid be named
To say no to thine asking?"
Once again
All pale she grew, for stung by sudden pain
Kiartan turned round upon the shrinking maid,
And, laughing wildly, with a scowl he said:
"All women are alike to me—all good—
All blessings on this fair earth by the rood!"

Then silence fell on all, yet he began
Within awhile to talk to maid and man
Mildly as he was wont, and through the days
That they abode together in that place
Seemed little changed; and so his father thought
When he to him at last his greeting brought,
And bade him home to Herdholt. So they rode,
Talking of many things, to his abode,
Nor naming Gudrun aught. Thus Kiartan came
Back to his father's house, grown great of fame,
And tidingless a while day passed by day
What hearts soe'er 'neath sorrow's millstone lay.

Tidings brought to Bathstead of Kiartan's coming back.

YES, there the hills stood, there Lax-river ran
Down to the sea; still thrall and serving-man
Came home from fold and hayfield to the hall,
And still did Olaf's cheery deep voice call
Over the mead horns; danced the fiddle-bow,
And twanged the harp-strings, and still sweet enow
Were measured words, as someone skilled in song
Told olden tales of war, and love, and wrong.
—And Bodli's face from hall and board was gone,
And Gudrun's arms were round him, as alone
They lay, all unrebuked that hour, unless
The dawn, that glimmered on the wretchedness
Of Kiartan's lone and sleepless night, should creep
Cold-footed o'er their well-contented sleep,
And whisper, 'Sleep on, lapse of time is here
Death's brother, and the very Death is near!'

Such thoughts might haunt the poor deserted man,
When through the sky dawn's hopeless shiver ran,
And bitterness grew in him, as the day,
Cleared of fantastic half-dreams, cold and grey,
Was bared before him. Yet I deem, indeed,
That they no less of pity had good need.
Yea, had his eyes beheld that past high-tide
At Bathstead, where sat Gudrun as a bride

By Bodli Thorleikson! Her face of yore,
So swift to change, as changing thoughts passed o'er
Her eager heart, set now into a smile
That scarce the fools of mankind might beguile
To deeming her as happy: his, once calm
With dreamy happiness, that would embalm
Into sweet memory things of yesterday,
And show him pictures of things far away,
Now drawn, and fierce, and anxious, still prepared
It seemed, to meet the worst his worn heart feared.
A dismal wedding! every ear at strain
Some sign of things that were to be to gain;
A guard on every tongue lest some old name
Should set the poisoned smouldering pile aflame.
Silent the fierce dull sons of Oswif drank,
And Olaf back into his high seat shrank,
And seemed aged wearily, the while his sons
Glanced doubtfully at Bodli; more than once
Did one of them begin some word to speak,
And catch his father's eye, and then must break
His speech off with a smile not good or kind;
And in meanwhile the wise would fain be blind
To all these things, or cover boisterously
The seeds of ill they could not fail to see.

But if 'neath all folk's eyes things went e'en so,
How would it be then with the hapless two
The morrow of that feast? This know I well,
That upon Bodli the last gate of hell

Seemed shut at last, and no more like a star
Far off perchance, yet bright however far,
Shone hope of better days; yet he lived on,
And soon indeed, the worst of all being won,
And gleams of frantic pleasure therewithal,
A certain quiet on his soul did fall,
As though he saw the end and waited it.
But over Gudrun changes wild would flit,
And sometimes stony would she seem to be;
And sometimes would she give short ecstasy
To Bodli with a fit of seeming love;
And sometimes, as repenting sore thereof,
Silent the live-long day would sit and stare,
As though she knew some ghost were drawing near
And ere it came with all the world must break,
That she might lose no word it chanced to speak.

So slowly led the changed and weary days
Unto the gateway of the silent place,
Where either rest or utter change shall be;
But on an eve, when summer peacefully
Yielded to autumn, as men sat in hall
Two wandering churles old Oswif forth did call
Into the porch, and asked for shelter there.
And since unheeded none might make such prayer,
Soon 'mid the boisterous house-carles were they set,
The ugly turns of fortune to forget
In mirth and ease, and still with coarse rude jest
They pleased the folk, and laughed out with the best.

But while the lower hall of mirth was full
More than their wont the great folk there were dull;
Oswif was sunk in thought of other days,
And Gudrun's tongue idly some tale did praise
Her brother Ospak told, the while her heart
Midst vain recurring hopes was set apart;
And Bodli looked as though he still did bide
The coming fate it skilled no more to hide
From his sore wearied heart: no more there were
Upon the dais that eve; but when the cheer
Was over now, old Oswif went his ways,
But Ospak sat awhile within his place
Staring at Bodli with a look of scorn;
For much he grew to hate that face forlorn,
Bowed down with cares he might not understand.

At last midst Gudrun's talk, with either hand
Stretched out did Ospak yawn, and cried aloud
Unto the lower table's merry crowd:
"Well fare ye, fellows! ye are glad to-night;
What thing is it that brings you such delight?
We be not merry here."
Then one stepped forth,
And said: "Sooth, Ospak, but of little worth
Our talk was; yet these wandering churles are full
Of meat and drink, and need no rope to pull
Wild words and gleesome from them."
"Bring them here
Said Ospak, "they may mend our doleful cheer."

So from the lower end they came, ill clad,
Houseless, unwashen, yet with faces glad,
If for a while; yet somewhat timorous, too,
With such great men as these to have to do,
Although to fear was drink a noble shield.

"Well, fellows, what fair tidings are afield?"
Said Ospak, "and whence come ye?"
The first man
Turned leering eyes on Bodli's visage wan,
And o'er his face there spread a cunning grin.
But just as he his first word would begin,
The other, drunker, and a thought more wise
Maybe for that, said, screwing up his eyes,
"Say-all-you-know shall go with clouted head."

"Say-nought-at-all is beaten," Ospak said,
"If, with his belly full of great men's meat,
He has no care to make his speeches sweet."

"Be not wroth, son of Oswif," said the first;
"Now I am full I care not for the worst
That haps to-night; yet Mistress Gudrun there——"

"Tush!" said the second, "thou art full of care
For a man full of drink. Come, let her say
That as we came so shall we go away,
And all is soon told."
Ospak laughed thereat,

As sprawling o'er the laden board he sat,
His cheek close to his cup; but Gudrun turned
Unto him, pale, although her vexed heart burned
With fresh desire, and a great agony
Of hope strove in her.
"Tell thy tale to me
And have a gift therefor," she said: "behold!
My finger is no better for this gold!
Draw it off swiftly!"
Then she reached her hand
Out to the man, who wondering there did stand
Beholding it, half sobered by her face;
Nor durst he touch the ring.
"Unto this place
From Burgfirth did we come," he said, "and there,
Around a new-beached ship folk held a fair—
Kálf Asgeirson, men said, the skipper was—
But others to and fro did I see pass."

Still Ospak chuckled, lolling o'er his drink,
Nor any whit hereat did Gudrun shrink,
But Bodli rose up, and the hall 'gan pace,
As on the last time when in that same place
Kiartan and he and she together were;
And on this day of anguish and of fear,
Well-nigh his weary heart began to deem
That that past day did but begin a dream
From which he needs must wake up presently,
Those lovers in each other's arms to see,

To feel himself heart-whole and innocent;
"Yea, yea, a many people came and went
About the ship," he heard the first guest say;
"Gudmund and Thurid did I see that day,
And Asgeir and his daughter, and they stood
About a man, whose kirtle, red as blood,
Was fine as a King's raiment."
Ospak here
Put up his left hand slowly to his ear,
As one who hearkens, smiling therewithal,
And now there fell a silence on the hall,
As the man said:
"I had not seen before
This fair tall man, who in his sword-belt bore
A wondrous weapon, gemmed, and wrought with gold;
Too mean a man I was to be so bold
As in that place to ask about his name.
—Yet certes, mistress, to my mind it came,
That, if tales lied not, this was even he
Men said should wed a bride across the sea
And be a king—e'en Kiartan Olafson."

He looked about him when his speech was done
As one who feareth somewhat, but the word
He last had said, nought new belike had stirred
In those three hearts; Bodli still paced the floor
With downcast eyes, that sometimes to the door
Were lifted; Ospak beat upon the board
A swift tune with his hand; without a word

The gold ring from her finger Gudrun drew
And gave it to the man; and Ospak knew
A gift of Bodli Thorleikson therein,
Given when first her promise he did win.
Yet little wisdom seemed it to those men
About the dais to abide as then,
Though one turned o'er his shoulder as he went,
And saw how Ospak unto Gudrun leant
And nodded head at Bodli, and meanwhile
Thrust his forefinger with a mocking smile
At his own breast; but Gudrun saw him not,
Though their eyes met, nay, rather scarce had got
A thought of Bodli in her heart, for still
'Kiartan come back again,' her soul did fill,
'And I shall see him soon, with what changed eyes!'

And now did night o'er the world's miseries
Draw her dark veil, yet men with stolen light
Must win from restless day a restless night;
Then Gudrun 'gan bestir her, with a smile
Talking of common things a little while,
For Bodli to his seat had come again
And sat him down, though labour spent in vain
It was to speak to him; dull the night went,
And there the most of men were well content
When bed-time came at last. Then one by one
They left the hall till Bodli sat alone
Within the high-seat. No thought then he had
Clear to himself, except that all was bad

That henceforth was to come to him; the night
Went through its changes, light waned after light,
Until but one was left far down the hall
Casting a feeble circle on the wall,
Making the well-known things as strange as death;
Then through the windows came the night's last breath,
And 'gainst the yellow glimmer they showed blue
As the late summer dawn o'er Iceland drew;
And still he sat there, noting nought at all
Till at his back he heard a light footfall,
And fell a-trembling, yet he knew not why;
Nor durst he turn to look, till presently
He knew a figure was beside him, white
In the half dusk of the departing night,
For the last light had died; therewith he strove
To cry aloud, and might not, his tongue clove
Unto his mouth, no power he had to stand
Upon his feet, he might not bring his hand,
How much soe'er he tried, to his sword's hilt;
It seemed to him his sorrow and his guilt
Stood there in bodily form before his eyes,
Yet, when a dreadful voice did now arise
He knew that Gudrun spake:

"I came again
Because I lay awake, and thought how men
Have told of traitors, and I needs must see
How such an one to-night would look to me.
Night hides thee not, O Bodli Thorleikson,
Nor shall death hide from thee what thou hast done.

— What!—thou art grown afraid, thou tremblest then
Because I name death, seed of fearless men?
Fear not, I bear no sword, Kiartan is kind,
He will not slay thee because he was blind
And took thee for a true man time a-gone.
— My curse upon thee! Knowst thou how alone
Thy deed hath made me? Dreamest thou what pain
Burns in me now when he has come again?
Now, when the longed-for sun has risen at last
To light an empty world whence all has passed
Of joy and hope—great is thy gain herein!
A bitter broken thing to seem to win,
A soul the fruit of lies shall yet make vile;
A body for thy base lust to defile,
If thou durst come anigh me any more,
Now I have curst thee, that thy mother bore
So base a wretch among good men to dwell,
That thou mightst build me up this hot-walled hell.
—I curse thee now, while good and evil strive
Within me, but if longer I shall live
What shall my curse be then? myself so curst,
That nought shall then be left me but the worst,
That God shall mock himself for making me."

Breathless she stopped, but Bodli helplessly
Put forth his hands till he gained speech, and said
In a low voice, "Would God that I were dead!
And yet a word from him I hope to have
Kinder than this before I reach the grave!"

"Yea, he is kind, yea, he is kind!" she cried,
"He loveth all, and casts his kindness wide
Even as God; nor loves me more than God
Loves one among us crawlers o'er earth's sod.
And who knows how I love him? how I hate
Each face on which he looks compassionate!
—God help me! I am talking of my love
To thee! and such a traitor I may prove
As thou hast, ere the tale is fully done."

She turned from him therewith to get her gone,
But lingered yet, as waiting till he spake.
Day dawned apace, the sparrows 'gan to wake
Within the eaves; the trumpet of the swan
Sounded from far; the morn's cold wind, that ran
O'er the hall's hangings, reached her unbound hair,
And drave the night-gear round her body fair,
And stirred the rushes by her naked feet:
Most fair she was—their eyes a while did meet,
In a strange look, he rose with haggard face
And trembling lips, that body to embrace,
For which all peace for ever he had lost,
But wildly o'er her head her arms she tossed,
And with one dreadful look she fled away
And left him 'twixt the dark night and the day,
'Twixt good and ill, 'twixt love and struggling hate,
The coming hours of restless pain to wait.

The Yule-feast at Bathstead.

NOW the days wore, and nowise Kiartan stirred,
Or seemed as he would stir, and no man heard
Speech from him of the twain, for good or ill;
Yet was his father Olaf anxious still,
And doubted that the smouldering fire might blaze,
For drearily did Kiartan pass his days
After a while, and ever silently
Would sit and watch the weary sun go by,
Feeling as though the heart in him were dead.

Kálf Asgeirson came to the Peacock's stead
With Refna, more than once that autumn-tide;
And at the last folk 'gan to whisper wide
That she was meet for him, if anyone
Might now mate Kiartan, since Gudrun was gone.
If Kiartan heard this rumour I know not,
But Refna heard it and her heart waxed hot
With foolish hopes; for one of those she was
Who seem across the weary earth to pass,
That they may show what burden folk may bear
Of unrequited love, nor drawing near
The goal they aim at, die amidst the noise
Of clashing lusts with scarce-complaining voice.
God wot that Kiartan in his bitter need
To her kind eyes could pay but little heed;
Yet did he note that she looked kind on him,

Nor yet had all his kindness grown so dim
That he might pass her by all utterly,
And thereof came full many a biting lie.
  Now as the time drew on toward Yule once more,
Did Oswif send, as his wont was of yore,
To bid the men of Herdholt to the feast;
And howso things had changed, both most and least
Gan make them ready, all but Kiartan, who
That morn went wandering aimless to and fro
Amid the bustling groups, and spake no word.
To whom came Olaf when thereof he heard,
And spake with anxious face: "O noble son,
Wilt thou still harbour wrath for what is done?
Nay, let the past be past; young art thou yet,
And many another honour mayst thou get,
And many another love."
                    Kiartan turned round,
And said, "Yea, good sooth, love doth much abound
In this kind world! Lo! one more loved my love
Than I had deemed of—thus it oft shall prove!"

  So spake he sneering and high-voiced, then said,
As he beheld his father's grizzled head
And puckered brow: "What wouldst thou, father? see
Here in thy house do I sit quietly,
And let all folk live even suchlike life
As they love best; and wilt thou wake up strife?"

  "Nay, nay, son; but thou knowest that thy mood,

So lonely here, shall bring thee little good;
Thy grief grows greater as thou nursest it,
Nor 'neath thy burden ever shalt thou sit
As it increases on thee; then shall come
A dreadful tale on this once happy home.
Come rather, show all men thou wilt have peace
By meeting them, and it shall bring thee ease,
That sight once over, to think how thou art
A brave man still, not sitting with crushed heart
Amid the stirring world.

Then Kiartan gazed
Long on his father, as a man amazed,
But said at last: "Ah, thou must have thy will!
God wot I looked that the long days would kill
This bitter longing, if unfed it were
By sights and sounds. Now let the long days bear
Their fated burden! I will go with thee."

So like a dreaming man did Kiartan see
That place which once seemed holy in his eyes;
No cry of fury to his lips did rise
When o'er the threshold first he went, and saw
Bodli the son of Thorleik towards him draw,
Blood-red for shame at first, then pale for shame,
As from his lips the old kind speeches came,
And hand met hand. Coldly he spake, and said:

"Be merry, Bodli; thou art nobly wed!

Thou hadst the toil, and now the due reward
Is fallen to thee."
Then, like a cutting sword,
A sharp pain pierced him, as he saw far off
Gudrun's grey eyes turn, with a spoken scoff,
To meet his own; and there the two men stood,
Each knowing somewhat of the other's mood,
Yet scarce the master-key thereto; still stared
Kiartan at Gudrun; and his heart grew hard
With his despair: but toward him Bodli yearned,
As one who well that bitter task had learned;
And now he reached once more to him his hand,
But moveless for a while did Kiartan stand,
And had in heart to get him back again:
Yet with strong will he put aback his pain,
And passed by Bodli, noting him no whit,
And coldly at the feast that day did sit,
In outward seeming; and Gudrun no less
Sat in her place in perfect loveliness,
Untouched by passion: Bodli in meanwhile
From Kiartan's grave brow unto Gudrun's smile
Kept glancing, and in feverish eager wise
Strove to pierce through the mask of bitter lies
That hid the bitter truth; and still must fear,
Lest from the feast's noise he a shriek should hear,
When the thin dream-veil, torn across, should show
That in the very hell he lay alow.

Men say that when the guests must leave the place,

Bodli with good gifts many a man did grace,
And at the last bade bring up to the door
Three goodly horses such as ne'er before
Had Iceland seen, and turned his mournful eyes
To Kiartan's face, stern with the memories
Of many a past departing, bitter-sweet
And said

"O cousin, O my friend, unmeet
Is aught that here I have, for thy great fame,
Yet if it please thee still to be the same
As thou hast been to us, take these of me."

But as men crowded round about to see
The goodly steeds, spake Kiartan in low voice
"Strive not with fate, for thou hast made thy choice;
Thy gifts, thy love, may scarce now heal my heart—
—Look not so kind—God keep us well apart!"

No more they spake as then, but straightway rode
The Herdholt men unto their fair abode,
And so it fell that on the homeward way
'Gan Olaf to his well-loved son to say:

"Kiartan, howe'er the heart in thee did burn,
Unto no evil did this meeting turn;
Yet would that thou hadst taken gifts from him!
Now thou wilt go again?"

"My eyes are dim,
Belike, O father, with my bitter pain;
Yet doubt thou not but I shall go again,

E'en as I doubt not that fresh misery
I there shall gather as the days pass by.
Would I could tell thee all I think, and how
I deem thy wise hand dreadful seed doth sow!"

Kiartan weds Refna.

I THINK that Gudrun on the morrow morn
Deemed herself yet more wretched and forlorn
Than e'er before; I deem that Kiartan woke
And found it harder yet to bear the yoke
Than in past days—their eyes had met at last,
No look of anger from them had been cast
Sweet words might take away; no look of woe
A touch might turn to pleasure, none can know
But those who know the torturer Love, the bliss
That heals the stripes those bear who still are his.
Who knows what tale had been to tell, if she
Had met his first proud look all tearfully,
With weak imploring looks? Ah, sore she yearned
To cry aloud the things that in her burned,
To cast aside all fear and shame, and kneel
Before his feet, so she his lips might feel
Once more as in the old days; but, alas!
A wall of shame and wrong betwixt them was,
Nor could the past deeds ever be undone.
Sometimes it might be when they were alone
In quiet times—in evening twilight, when

Far off and softened came the voice of men;
Or, better yet, the murmur of the sea
Smote on the hearts of either peacefully,
Each to each kind would seem; until there came
The backward rush of pain and bitter blame
Unanswerable, cold, blighting, as the sea,
Let in o'er flowers—'Why didst thou so to me,
To me of all the world? while others strove
We looked to hold the sweetness of our love.
Yea, if earth failed beneath our feet—and now
How is the sweet turned bitter!—yea, and thou
Art just so nigh to me, that still thou art
A restless anguish to my craving heart.'

Take note too midst all this, that Gudrun heard
Rumoured about this added bitter word,
That Refna, Asgeir's daughter, looked to wear
The coif the Norway queen had meant for her,
When Kiartan left that broken heart behind;
For that tale too her hungry ears must find.
Then would she clean forget all other woe,
In thinking how she dreamed the days would go,
That while she waited doubting nought of him;
Then would the past and future wax all dim
In brooding o'er that unaccomplished bliss,
In moaning to herself, 'twixt kiss and kiss
The things she would have said, in picturing,
As in the hopeful time, how arms would cling
About her, and sweet eyes, unsatisfied

E'en with the fullness of all bliss, would hide
No love from her—and she forgot those eyes
What they were now, all dulled with miseries;
And she forgot the sorrow of the heart
That fate and time from hers had thrust apart.
Still wrong bred wrong within her, day by day
Some little speck of kindness fell away,
Till in her heart naked desire alone
Was left, the one thing not to be undone.
Then would the jealous flame in such wise burn
Within her, that to Bodli would she turn,
And madden him with fond caressing touch
And tender word; and he, worn overmuch
With useless striving, still his heart would blind,
Unto the dread awaking he should find.

Doubt not, that of this too had Kiartan heard,
If nought but idle babbling men had stirred,
But more there was; for the fierce-hearted fools,
The sons of Oswif, made these twain their tools
To satisfy their envious hate; for they
Waxèd eviller-hearted as day followed day,
Grudging the Peacock's house its luck and fame;
And when into their household Bodli came,
In such wise as ye know, with hate and scorn,
Which still they had, of his grave face and worn,
A joy began to mingle presently,
A thought that they through him might get to see
Herdholt beneath their feet in grief and shame;

So cunningly they turned them to the game
As such men will, and scattered wide the seeds,
Lies, and words half-true, of the bitterest deeds.
For doubt not, kindly-natured though he were,
That Kiartan too was changing: who would hear
Such things as once he heard, from one who went
'Twixt the two houses, with no ill intent,
But blabbing and a fool, well stuffed with lies,
At Ospak's hands—for in most loving wise
The new-wed folk lived now, he said; soon too
He deemed would Bodli draw to him a crew,
And take ship for the southlands: "Nought at all
Was talked of last night in the Bathstead hall,
But about England and King Ethelred."

"Well, and was Gudrun merry?" Haldor said,
Yet stammered saying it, 'neath Kiartan's frown,
Who cleared his brow though, nor e'en looked adown
As the man answered, smiling, pleased to show
That he somewhat of great folk's minds did know:

"Yea, marry, was she merry. Good cause why
For she will go with Bodli certainly,
And win such fame as women love to do;
Ye well may wot he saith no nay thereto
If she but ask him; they sat hand in hand
As if no folk were left in all the land
Except themselves."

He stayed his talk hereat,

For men looked strangely on him as he sat
Smiling and careless, casting words that bit
Like poisoned darts: no less did Kiartan sit
With unchanged face, nor rose to go away,
Yea, even strove within himself to say:
'Good luck go with them! mine she cannot be,
May she be happy, here, or over sea!
Why should I wish aught ill on them to fall?'

And yet, indeed, a flood of bitterest gall
Swept o'er his heart; despite himself he thought:
'So now, to lonely ways behold me brought,
She will not miss me more—so change the days,
And Bodli's loving looks and Bodli's praise
Shall be enough for her. I am alone,
And ne'er shall be aught else—would I were gone
From where none need me now—belike my fame
Shall be forgotten, wrapped in Bodli's name,
E'en as my kisses on the lips, that once
Trembled with longing through the change of suns—
Those years in Norway shall be blotted out
From song and story—yea, or men shall doubt
If I or Bodli there that praise did win—
What say I, for I deem that men begin
To doubt if e'er I loved my love at all!'

So thought he, mid the clamour of the hall,
Where few men knew his heart, but rather thought
That he began now somewhat to be brought

From out his gloom; withal, time wore away,
And certainly as day comes after day,
So change comes after change in minds of men;
So otherwise he 'gan to be, than when
In early days his pain, nigh cherished, clung
Unto his wounded heart; belike it stung
Bitterer at whiles, now that he knew his life,
And hardened him to meet the lingering strife
'Gainst the cold world that would not think of him
Too much. The kindness of old days waxed dim
Within his heart; he hearkened when men spake
Hard things about his love, for whose dear sake
Had fame once seemed so light a thing to win.
A blacker deed now seemed his fellow's sin
When lesser seemed the prize that it did gain;
Little by little from his bitter pain
Fell off the softening veil of tenderness;
Moody and brooding was he none the less,
And all the world, with all its good and ill,
Seemed nothing meet to move his sluggish will.

And now a whole long year had passed, since he
Stood wildered by the borders of the sea
'Neath his first sorrow. Herdholt late had seen
A noble feast, and thereat had there been
Among the guests Refna, the tender maid;
Gentle of mood, and pale, with head down-weighed
She sat amidst the feast; and Kiartan saw
That much she changed as he anigh did draw,
That her eyes brightened, and a sprightlier grace

Came o'er her lips, and colour lit her face.
And so when all the guests therefrom were gone,
Thurid, his sister, sat with him alone
Close upon sunset; thoughtful now was she,
He gayer than it was his wont to be,
And many things he spake to her; at last
The absent look from off her face she cast,
For she had listened little; and she said;
"Yea, brother, is she not a lovesome maid?"

He started, "Who?" he said, "I noted not."

She smiled, "Nay, then is beauty soon forgot;
Yet if I were a man, not old or wise,
Methinks I should remember wide grey eyes,
Lips like a scarlet thread, skin lily-white,
Round chin, smooth brow 'neath the dark hair's delight,
Fair neck, slim hands, and dainty limbs, well hid,
Since unto most of men doth fate forbid
To hold them as their own."
A dark cloud spread
O'er Kiartan's face: "Sister, forbear," he said;
"I am no lover, unto me but nought
Are these things grown."
Nigher her face she brought
To his, and said: "And yet were I a man,
And noted how the love of me began
To move within the heart of such a maid
As Refna is, not soon her face would fade
From out my memory."

"Nay, nay, thou sayst
Fools' words," he said, "and every word dost waste;
Who shall love broken men like unto me?"

And therewithal he sprang up angrily
And would be gone: she stayed him: "Were it so
That over well she loved; what wouldst thou do?"

"What should I do?" he said; "I have no heart
To give away, let her e'en act my part
And find the days right dreary, yet live on."

"Methinks," she said, "the end will soon be won
For her, poor maid! surely she waneth fast."

And Thurid sighed withal; but Kiartan passed
Swiftly away from her: and yet he went
Unto his bed that night less ill content,
And ere he slept, of Ingibiorg he thought,
And all the pleasure her sweet love had brought
While he was with her; and this maid did seem
Like her come back amidst a happy dream.
The next morn came, and through his dreariness
A sweet thought somewhat did his heart caress;
Howe'er he put it from him, back it came
Until it gathered shape, and took the name
Of pity, and seemed worthy to be nursed.
So wore the days, and life seemed not so cursed

With this to think of—this so set apart
From all the misery that wrung his heart;
Until the sweet ruth grew, until he deemed
That yet perchance her love was only dreamed,
That she was heart-whole, yea, or loved indeed
But for another man was in such need:
And at that thought blank grew the world again,
And his old pain was shot across with pain
As woof hides warp. Ah, well! what will you have?
This was a man some shreds of joy to save
From out the wreck, if so he might, to win
Some garden from the waste, and dwell therein.
And yet he lingered long, or e'er he told
His heart that it another name might hold
With that of the lost Gudrun. Time and sight
Made Refna's love clear as the noonday light;
Yea, nowise hard it was for him to think
That she without this joy would quickly sink
Into death's arms—and she, she to fade thus
God's latest marvel! eyes so piteous
With such sweet longing, midst her beauty rare,
As though they said, 'Nought worthy thee is here,
Yet help me if thou canst: yet, if I die,
Like sweet embalmment round my heart shall lie
This love, this love, this love I have for thee;
Look once again before thou leavest me!'

She died not wholly joyless; they were wed,
When twenty changing moons their light had shed

On the dark waves of Burgfirth, since in trust
Of Gudrun's love, over the bridge new thrust
From out the ship, the much-praised Kiartan ran.
So strangely shift men's lives in little span.

The Sword comes back without the Scabbard.

WHEN of this wedding first came tidings true
To Bathstead, then it was that Gudrun knew
How much of hope had been before that day
Within her heart; now, when a cast-away
Upon the lonely rocks of life, she was
With nought to help whate'er might come to pass,
Deaf, dumb, and blind, long hours she went about
Her father's house, till folk began to doubt
If she would ever speak a word again;
Nay, scarce yet could she think about her pain,
Or e'en know what it was, but seemed to face
Some huge blank wall within a lonely place.
And Bodli watched her with a burning heart
Baffled and beaten back, yet for his part
Something like hope 'gan flit before his eyes,
Hope of some change e'en if new miseries
Wrapped it about.
As on a day she went
Slow-footed through the hall without intent,
Taking no heed of aught, of Kiartan's name
She heard one speak, and to her stunned heart came

A flash of hope and pain, against her will
Her foot must stay her, and she stood there still,
And turning round she saw where Ospak stood,
And slowly talking in a sullen mood
Unto his brother Thorolf; but they made
As though they saw her not, and Ospak said:

"Thou art young, Thorolf, and thy words are vain,
So it has been, so it shall be again,
One man shall deem all others made for him,
And 'neath his greatness shall all fame grow dim;
Till on a day men try if he is man—
Eh! what then falleth—let him, if he can,
Play Thor among the mannikins, and cast
The swords aback when he is caught at last."

"Hist!" Thorolf said; "there sister Gudrun goes!
Kiartan has froze her heart up: stand we close!"

Then Ospak laughed: "She will not hear us yet,
She hath a hope she cannot quite forget,
That he who twice has flung her love aside,
Will come some day to claim her as his bride,
When he has slain our long-faced champion there!
Good sooth, the house of Hauskuld waxeth fair,
We shall have kings in Iceland ere our day
Is quite gone by."
Slowly she gat away
Stung to the heart by those coarse words of hate,

Wondering withal what new thought lay in wait
To change her life; she sat her down alone
And covered up her face, and one by one
Strove to recall the happy days past by,
And wondering why they past so happily
While yet none strove for happiness; at last
She raised her head up and a glance she cast
Unto the open door, and down the hall
A streak of sun on Bodli's head did fall
As he turned round and saw her; then she said
Unto herself: 'Nay, then, love is not dead
Since Bodli lives: why should I hate him then
Because he heeded not the shame of men
Amidst his love? but thou, I once called love,
On whom I flung my heart, with whom I strove
For ever, thy weak measured love to make
Equal to mine, what didst thou for my sake?
Thy soul is saved, thy fame is won, and thou
Hast a fair damsel's arms about thee now—
Not mine—and thou art happy. Who can tell,
O Bodli Thorleikson, but down in hell
We twain shall love, and love, and love again,
When the first wave of the eternal pain
Has washed our folly from us, and I know
Why upon earth I loved a weak heart so
That loved me not, while I was ice to thee,
O loving lovesome traitor."

Wearily
She hung her head with parted lips awhile,

Silent she sat, until a bitter smile
Bemocked her face: "Yet if I call thee love,
And kiss thee with sweet kisses, such as move
Great men to great deeds, trust me not too much,
But think of honied words and tremulous touch
As things that slay. If Kiartan lay there dead,
How I should love him!"
Once more sank her head,
And long she sat in silence, till at last
She heard how Bodli toward her bower passed,
And rose and met him coldly, with no sign
That anywise her vexed heart did incline
To ease the bitter burden that he bore.

Unheeding all, the year moved as before,
And autumn came again. What hearts soe'er
The younger folk each unto each might bear
Olaf and Oswif chose to shut their eyes,
And close their ears, as peaceful men and wise,
And make believe that nought amiss there was
'Twixt the two houses; so it came to pass
That Bathstead to the Herdholt feast did go
At autumn-tide once more at least; and though
Kiartan was loth enow those folk to face,
Yet so hard Olaf prayed that he would grace
His father's house with his great fame, and sit,
Yet once again while he might look at it,
A glory to the feast, that he put by
His doubts once more, and there with troubled eye

Noted the twain among the Bathstead crowd,
And Oswif's ill sons, insolent and loud,
And turned pale when the words of greeting came
From out his lips. Meanwhile, with shrinking shame
And anxious heart, did Refna gaze upon
Gudrun's great beauty, deeming she had won
A troublous lot; and Kiartan, noting that,
And how scarce like the mistress there she sat,
Yet to his eyes seemed fairer, because love
Had forged the fear that so her heart did move,
Grew wroth that still so many memories
Must vex his heart, and turn aside his eyes
To Gudrun, the world's wonder there, whose face,
Now coldly watchful, scanned the busy place.

Men say that at this feast three things betid,
Whereby the flame the elders deemed well hid,
Showed through the heap of smouldering love and hate.
First, when the new-come guests did stand and wait
Till they were marshalled to their seats, the maid
Who did this for the women turned and said
To Kiartan, "Who the high-seat fills to-day
Beside the goodwife?"

In most bright array
Stood Gudrun, gazing ever at the bride,
As though she saw not anything beside;
And Kiartan noted her, and therewith deemed
That in her eyes a look of hate there gleamed,
And saw withal Refna's soft eyes fall down

Before hers; then he spake out, with a frown:

"Nay, thou art foolish, damsel: who shall sit
In the best place, if I may deal with it,
Saving my wife?" But as he said the word,
The struggling devil so his vexed heart stirred,
That he must look at Gudrun; their eyes met,
Paler she grew than he had seen her yet,
Then red as blood; but he waxed wroth and said:

"Ah, wert thou e'en so foolish, then, O maid?
For such a guest belike we have got here
As thinketh everything of great or dear,
Honour, and hearts of men, and women's tears
Are but for her." Then tingling took the ears
Of those that stood thereby, as he strode off,
Gudrun's cold smile was bitterer than a scoff
Spoken aloud: but Ospak laughed, and said
In a loud whisper, close to Bodli's head.

"Nay, thou shalt have to fight for Gudrun yet,
Even though Refna did the bride-bed get.
He deems our sister may not quench the thought
Of all the joy she erst to Herdholt brought.
Ah, we shall yet see Refna lie a-cold,
Brother-in-law, unless thou waxest bold."

Such a beginning to the feast there was.

Moreover, the next day it came to pass,

As folk ere supper sported in the hall,
That unto her did goodwife Thorgerd call
The gentle Refna, bidding her as one
Who well might bid, to do the rich coif on,
The wonder of the Greeks, the fair queen's gift:
Then Refna reddened, and her eyes did lift
To Kiartan, e'en as asking him thereof;
But he spake nought, her soft look might not move
His heart from deep thought; so she went her ways,
Scarce happy 'neath his far-off moody gaze,
And came back glittering like a new-born star,
And sat upon the dais seen afar
Down the dusk hall. Then Ospak noted how
Gudrun turned pale, and he his teeth did show
Like a crossed hound, and muttered:
"Past belief,
As men may deem it, sister, yet a thief
Asgeir begat; for 'longeth not that gold
To Bathstead, if the tale be rightly told?"

Now Kiartan seemed to wake as from a dream,
When in the torches' flare that gold did gleam,
And went across to Refna's side, and said,
Smiling and whispering: "More I love thy head
Uncovered, O my love; yea, and withal,
Sharp swords thy helm from out their sheaths may call:
Look down there, how the sons of Oswif scowl
Around poor Bodli's face; the storm doth growl
Afar already—nay, nay, fear thee nought!—

But good I deemed it thou shouldst know my thought."

Sour and sick-hearted Gudrun turned away,
Noting how Kiartan's hand on Refna's lay,
And how their cheeks were close each unto each.
And Refna's eyes that love did so beseech,
Her soft mouth, tremulous with longing sore
For yet more kisses, long time hung before
Her weary eyes upon that weary night,
Yea, and till mirth of men was slain by light.

Hearken once more: the morn the guests should go,
About the stead Kiartan went to and fro,
Busied in such things, as his father's son,
For honour's very sake, must see well done;
And as he ordered how the folk should ride,
His sword, 'The King's Gift' named, which by his side
Was ever wont to hang, upon his bed
He left awhile, and, when the guests were sped,
Came back to seek the same, and found it gone.
Then questioning there was of everyone,
And mighty trouble; An the Black meanwhile,
A sturdy house-carle, slipped out with a smile,
Just as old Olaf to his son 'gan talk
In such wise:
"Son, hate far abroad will walk
E'en when new born, although we nurse it not:
Now my heart tells me much must be forgot,
Many words hidden, many sights be seen

By thine eyes only, son, if I, between
Death and the end of life shall see thee last;
And hold thy living hands as life goes past,
Mine eyes a-waxing dim: wait then, and hope;
Thou shalt grow stronger with the world to cope,
If thou sitst down with patience, casting not
Long days and sweet on drawing of a lot"
  Such things and more he spake, and Kiartan heard
With kind eyes, if his heart were little stirred.
But, as they sat and talked thereof, came back,
Smiling, but panting sorely, An the Black,
And in his cloak he carried something wrapped.

"Well," Olaf said, "and what new thing hath happed?"

"Soon told," said An; "I followed them afar,
Knowing what thieves those Bathstead skinkers are,
And at the peat moss where the road doth wind
About the dale, young Thorolf lagged behind;
I saw him take a something from his cloak,
And thrust it down just where the stream doth soak
The softest through the peat; then swift again
Ride on: so when they might not see me plain,
O ho, says I, and comes up to the place,
And here and there I peer with careful face
Until at last I draw this fair thing forth;
—A pity though, the scabbard is of worth!
Clean gone it is."

Then from his cloak he drew
'The King's Gift' bright and naked. Olaf grew
Joyous thereover, praising An right well.
But Kiartan 'gan to gloom: "Ah, who can tell,"
He muttered, as he took the sword to him,
"But this shall end the troublous tale and dim?—
Well, I at least cast not the sheath away;
Bewail not ye too much, who have to pay
For pleasure gained; his may the worst hap be,
Who best can bear the pain and misery."

The Stealing of the Coif.

NOW howso Olaf bade An hold his peace,
And Kiartan promised he would nowise cease.
To show a good face to the world on all
That 'twixt the houses yet might chance to fall,
Certain it is, that ere long, far and wide
The tale was known, throughout the country-side;
Nay, more than this, to Kiartan's ears it came
That Oswif's sons deemed they had cast a shame
On Herdholt, and must mock him openly
And call him 'Mire-blade,' e'en when those were by
Who held him of the most account; no less
Kiartan was moved not from his quietness,
Nor did aught hap 'twixt autumn and Yule-tide;
Then men at Herdholt busied them to ride
To Bathstead once again, and Olaf said:

Wilt thou once more be guided by my head,
Son Kiartan, and with brave heart go to face
The troublous things that wait thee in that place?"

"Well," Kiartan said, "if so I deemed, that fate
Might be turned back of men, or foolish hate
Die out for lack of fuel, no more would I
Unto the Bathstead hall-door draw anigh;
But forasmuch as now I know full well,
That the same story there shall be to tell
Whether I go, or whether I refrain,
Let all be as thou wilt; and yet we twain
Not oft again, O father, side by side
Unto this merry-making place shall ride."

Then Olaf sighed, as though indeed he knew
To what an end his latter days now drew.

So now all folk were ready there, but when
The women came their ways to meet the men,
Said Thorgerd unto Refna: "Well, this tide
Thou hast the coif, no doubt, and like a bride
Hast heart to look midst those whose hearts are cold
To thee and thine."

Then Refna did behold
Thorgerd's stern face in trembling wise, and said:
"Nay, goodwife, what fair cloth may coif my head
Shall matter little mid the many things
Men have to talk of: rise and fall of kings

And changes of the world: within my chest
The coif lies."
"There," said Kiartan, "might it rest
For thee and me, sweet; yet I mind indeed
When I, a froward child, deemed I had need
Of some sharp glittering thing, as axe or knife,
But little would my mother raise up strife
With me therefor, and even as I would
I cut myself: so if she think this good
Let fetch the Queen's Gift."
Refna looked adown
Shamefaced and puzzled, Thorgerd with a frown
Turned upon Kiartan, but he smiled in turn,
And said: "Yea, mother, let the red gold burn
Among the lights at Bathstead; great am I
E'en as thou deemst; and men must let pass by
Their hatred to me, whatso say their hearts;
Come, open-handed let us play our parts."

So was the coif brought, and once more they rode
Unto the door of Oswif's fair abode;
And there they feasted merrily enow—
—Such of them as were fools, or cared not how
The next week went—and at the highest tide
Of all the feast, sat Refna as a bride
Coifed with the Queen's Gift; Gudrun stern and cold
Scarce would the tender face of her behold,
Or cast a look at Kiartan; rather she
Did press the hand of Bodli lovingly,

Softening her face for him alone of all:
Then would strange tumult on his spirit fall,
Mingled of pain and uttermost delight
To think the whole world had so swerved from right
To give him pleasure for a little while,
Nor durst he look upon his old friend's smile,
Who, glad with his own manhood seemed to be
Once more, once more the brave heart frank and free,
As though at last the trouble and the coil
That wrapped him round, and made him sadly toil
Through weary days, had fallen all clean away,
And smiling he might meet the bitterest day.

So passed the high-tide forth unto its end
But when at last folk from the place would wend,
And Refna fain would have the coif of her
Whose office was to tend the women's gear—
—Lo, it was gone—then Refna trembled sore,
And passing through the crowd about the door
Whispered to Kiartan: Ospak stood anigh
And bit his lips, and watched her eagerly,
And Kiartan with a side-long glance could see
His colour come and go, and cried:
"Let be,
Light won, light gone! if still it is 'bove ground,
Doubt thou not, Refna, it shall yet be found."

Folk looked on one another; Thorgerd said,
Turning on Gudrun: "Small account is made

Of great folk's gifts, then; I have seen the day
When Egil's kin a man or two would slay
For things less worth than this."
Her angry frown
Gudrun met calmly: "Was the thing his own?
Then let him do e'en as he will with it;
Small loss it is methinks for her to sit
Without his old love's gift upon her head!"

Ere Thorgerd answered, Kiartan cried, and said:
"Come swift to saddle! Cousin, ride with me,
Until we turn the hill anigh the sea;
I fain would speak with thee a word or twain
That I have striven to think about in vain
These last days that we met."
Bodli flushed red
And looked adown: "So be it then," he said.
Then stammered and turned pale, and said, "Enow
Shall one sword be to-day betwixt us two;
Take thou the rover's weapon, O fair wife."

She looked on him, her lovely face was rife
With many thoughts, but Kiartan's kindly gaze
Seemed to bring back the thoughts of happier days
To both of them, and swift away she passed
Unto her bower; and men were horsed at last,
And sharp the hoofs upon the hard way rung.
So as into the saddle Kiartan swung,
He leant toward Ospak, and said mockingly:

"I love thee—I would not that thou shouldst die;
So see me not too oft, because I have
A plague sometimes, that bringeth to the grave,
Those that come nigh me; live on well and whole!"

Then to his face rushed Ospak's envious soul,
His hand fell on his sword-hilt as he shrank
Back to the doorway, while the fresh air drank
Kiartan's clear laughter, as their company
Rode jingling down unto the hoary sea.

But the last smile from off his face was gone,
When silent, in a while he rode alone
With Bodli silent: then he said to him:
"Thou seest, Bodli, how we twain must swim
Adown a strange stream—thou art weaponless
To-day, and certes bides my sword no less
Within its scabbard—how long shall it last?"

Then Bodli cried, "Until my life is past—
Shall I take life from thee as well as love?"

"Nay," Kiartan said, "be not too sure thereof,
Bethink thee where by thine own deed thou art
Betwixt a passionate woman's hungry heart,
And the vile envy of a dangerous fool;
Doubt not but thou art helpless, and the tool
Of thy mad love, and that ill comes from ill,
And as a thing begins, so ends it still—

—Nay, not to preach to thee I brought thee here,
Rather to say that the old days are dear,
Despite of all, unto my weary heart.
And now methinks from them and thee I part
This day; not unforgiven, whatsoe'er
Thou at my hands, or I of thine may bear.
For I too—shall I guide myself indeed,
Or rather be so driven by hard need
That still my hand as in a dream shall be,
While clearly sees the heart that is in me
Desires I may not try to bring to pass?
So since no more it may be as it was
In the past days, when fair and orderly
The world before our footsteps seemed to lie,
Now in this welter wherein we are set,
Lonely and bare of all, deem we not yet
That each for each these ill days we have made;
Rather the more let those good words be weighed
We spake, when truth and love within us burned,
Before the lesson of our life was learned.
What say'st thou? are the days to come forgiven,
Shall folk remember less that we have striven,
Than that we loved, when all the tale is told?"

Then long did Bodli Kiartan's face behold,
Striving for speech: then said, "Why speak'st thou so?
Twice over now I seem my deed to do,
Twice over strive to wake as from a dream,
That I, once happy, never real may deem,

So vile and bitter is it; may thy sword
If e'er we meet be sharper than thy word,
And make a speedy end of doubt and strife;
Fear not to take much from me, taking life!"

Still seemed the air filled with his words when he
Turned back to Bathstead, and the murmuring sea
Seemed from afar to speak of rest from pain.
Then on a little knoll he shortened rein,
And turned about, and looking toward the hill
Beheld the spear of Kiartan glittering still,
When all the rest of him behind the brow
Was sunken; but the spear sank quickly now,
And slowly home withal did Bodli ride,
E'en as he might the coming end to bide.

Refna hears Women talking.

SO the days wore with nothing new to tell,
Till spring-tide once more on the country fell,
Then on a night as Kiartan to his bed
Would go, still Refna sat with bowed-down head
And stirred not, nor a while would speak, when he
Spake to her in kind words and lovingly;
At last she lifted up a face, wherein
Somewhat did trouble upon sorrow win,
And said:

"Indeed of all thy grief I knew,
But deemed if still thou saw'st me kind and true,
Not asking too much, yet not failing aught
To show that not far off need love be sought,
If thou shouldst need love—if thou sawest all this,
Thou wouldst not grudge to show me what a bliss
Thy whole love was, by giving unto me
As unto one who loved thee silently,
Now and again the broken crumbs thereof:
Alas! I, having then no part in love,
Knew not how nought, nought can allay the soul
Of that sad thirst, but love untouched and whole!
Kinder than e'er I durst have hoped thou art,
Forgive me then, that yet my craving heart
Is so unsatisfied; I know that thou
Art fain to dream that I am happy now,
And for that seeming ever do I strive;
Thy half-love, dearest, keeps me still alive
To love thee; and I bless it—but at whiles—"

So far she spake till her weak quivering smiles
Faded before the bitterness of love.
Her face changed, and her passion 'gan to move
Within her breast until the sobs came fast,
And down upon her hands her face she cast,
And by the pain of tears her heart did gain
A little respite; nor might she refrain
From weeping yet, when Kiartan's arms she felt
About her, and for long her fair lips dwelt

With hungry longing on his lips, and he
Spake to her:
'"O poor lover, long may we
Live upon earth, till lover and beloved
Each is to each, by one desire moved;
And whereas thou dost say to me, Forgive,
Forgive me rather! A short while to live
Once seemed the longest life of man to me,
Wherein my love of the old years to see;
But could I die now, and be born again
To give my whole heart up to ease thy pain,
A short while would I choose to live indeed.
But is it not so, sweet, that thou hast need
To tell me of a thing late seen or heard?
Surely by some hap thy dear heart is stirred
From out its wonted quiet; ease thine heart
And 'twixt us twain thy fear and grief depart!"

She looked up: "Yea, kind love, I thought to tell
Of no great thing that yesterday befell.
Why should I vex thee with it? Yet thy fame,
If I must say the word, in question came
Therein. Yet prithee, mark it not too much!"

He smiled and said: "Nay, be the tidings such
As mean my death, speak out and hide not aught!"

She sat a little while, as though she thought
How best to speak, then said: "The day being good,

About noon yesterday in peaceful mood
I wandered by the brook-side, and at last
Behind a great grey stone myself I cast,
And slept, as fate would have it; when I woke
At first I did but note the murmuring brook,
But as my hearing and my sight did clear
The sound of women's voices did I hear,
And in the stream two maidens did I see,
Our housefolk, and belike they saw not me,
Since I lay low adown, and up the stream
Their faces turned; I from a half-sweet dream,
I know not what, awaked, no sooner heard
Their first word, than sick-hearted and afeard
I grew, the cold and evil world to feel;
So hard it seemed, love, with my life to deal:
Bitterly clear I saw; as if alone
And dead, I saw the world; by a grey stone
Within the shallows, washing linen gear
They stood; their voices sounded sharp and clear;
Half smiles of pleasure and of goodlihead,
Shone on their faces, as their rough work sped;
O God, how bright the world was!"

A flush came

Across her face; as stricken by some shame
She stammered, when she went on: "Thus their speech,
Broken amid their work mine ear did reach
As I woke up to care, for the one said,
'Yea, certes, now has Kiartan good end made
Of all his troubles, things go well enow.'

'Over well,' said the other, 'didst thou know?'
'Know what?' the first one said. 'What knowst thou
then?'
'Nay, nought except the certain talk of men.'
'Well, hear I not men too, what wilt thou say?'
She said, 'Men talk that this is latter May,
And Kiartan sitteth still and nought is done
For the two thefts of Bathstead to atone.'
'Fool!' saith the first one, 'shall all fall to strife
For what in no wise maketh worse their life?'
'Well, well, and what will Refna say thereto?
Things had been otherwise a while ago;
Scarce Kiartan's brother had stripped Gudrun's head
Of what she loved, and yet 'scaped lying dead
By this time. Ospak, sure, is safe enow.'
'Ah!' said the other, 'great things sayest thou!'
'True words I speak, when this I say to thee,
That glad would Gudrun and our Kiartan be
If Bodli Thorleikson and Refna lay
Dead on the earth upon the selfsame day;
And this from all men's daily talk I draw;
Old friends are last to sever, saith the saw.'

"This was the last word that I heard, O love,
For from the place softly I 'gan to move
Ere they might see me, and my feet, well taught
To know the homeward way, my body brought
Unto my bower; yet scarce I saw the way,
Rather some place beneath the sod, where lay

A few white bones, unnamed, unheeded, while
Hard by within this bower 'twixt word and smile
Was breast strained unto breast of twain I knew—
—And needs must part awhile, that I might rue
My life, my death, my bitter useless birth.
O Kiartan, over-weary seemed the earth
Yesterday and to-day; too hard to bear
Within thine home to be, and see thee near,
And think that but for very kindness thou
Must wish me dead—thou didst not note me, how
My face was worn with woe throughout that tide,
Though most men looked on me—for thou must bide
A weary waiting, and thy woe untold
Must make thy face at whiles seem hard and cold.
—Ah me! forgive me that I talk of this!
Think how my heart ached!"

For now kiss on kiss
Did Kiartan shower upon her quivering face,
Yet, even as their arms did interlace,
Despite his love and pity, of past years
He needs must think, of wasted sighs and tears
And hopes all fallen to nought, and vows undone,
And many a pleasure from his life seemed gone;
And sorely his heart smote him for her faith
So pure and changeless; her love strong as death,
As kind as God, that nought should satisfy
Till all the shows of earth had passed her by.

Kiartan fetches the price of the Coif from Bathstead.

AND now a day or two with brooding face
Did Kiartan go about from place to place
And speak few words to any, till one day
He bade his men see to their war-array,
For two hours after midnight all and some
Into the hall to wait his word should come,
And whoso blabbed, he said, the deed should rue.
So thitherward in arms that night they drew;
And Refna trembling lay, while Kiartan clad
His body in the best war-gear he had,
And through the hangings did she watch the spears,
And dreadful seemed the laughter to her ears,
And red the lamps burned, as with twilight grey
They mingled: then he turned to go away,
And kissed her as he spake:
"Refna, this eve,
Most like, a noble gift shalt thou receive;
Do thou thy part to meet it with good grace,
And gather what thou canst into this place
Of fiddlers and of glee-men, and with song
Meet that good gift that comes to heal thy wrong."

Now Refna durst not ask, What wilt thou then,
And whither go to-night these all-armed men?
Because she deemed she knew what word it was

That all this clash of arms had brought to pass,
And sick at heart she grew to think thereof,
And with her fair white arms made strong by love
She clung to Kiartan, but he drew her hold
With gentle hands from off the mail rings cold.
And kissed her sweet mouth opened now to speak,
And gat him gone; and she fell back all weak
Upon her bed, and lying there alone,
Saw how his war-gear in the bright light shone,
And heard his cheery voice as he cried loud,
"To Bathstead, ho!" and then the noisy crowd
Passed clashing from the hall, and nothing there
Within a little while might Refna hear,
But the dawn's noises, and the loitering tread
Of some maid getting slowly back to bed;
So there she lay alone in grief and fear,
But hope's fresh voice shuddering she needs must hear
Whispering wild words, yet sweet, of chance and crime,
Telling the wondrous ways of slowfoot time.

But now at Bathstead ere they rose that morn,
Men deemed they heard the winding of a horn,
And, running straightway to the door, could see
About the stead a goodly company,
And there were Olaf's sons with sixty men
Besetting every gate and door; but when
The men of Bathstead were all armed and went
Unto the door, they saw a gay-striped tent
Just raised upon the slope-side 'gainst the hall

And armed men round about it; one man, tall
Beyond his fellows, stood some yards more near
The hall-door, leaning on a pennoned spear,
Clad in a glittering mail-coat, with a shield
About his neck, where, on a golden field
The holy Rood of God was painted fair;
From 'neath his gilded helm his golden hair
Fell waving down, but hidden were his eyes
By the wide brim: then did great fear arise
Within their hearts, despite their fiery hate,
Because they knew that now at last, if late,
Was Kiartan's might aroused and in the field
But none the less little would Ospak yield
To any fear; before the rest he strode,
And cried aloud:
"Within this fair abode
Has been thy place, O Kiartan Olafson,
And not without; what ill deed hast thou done
That father Oswif has forbidden thee
Thy honoured seat where it was wont to be?"

The tall man moved not, but a deep voice came
From 'neath his helm: "Thou art right wise to name
A hidden head; grow wiser! sick am I,
And somewhat deadly now to come anigh;
My sword has lost its scabbard 'gainst my will,
Beware then, for its naked edge may kill!"

Then Ospak raised the spear in his right hand

And shook it, but the tall man forth did stand
And pushed his helm aback and showed the face
Of Kiartan, and across the grassy space
Cried mightily: "Be wise, and get ye back!
Of fighting one day shall ye have small lack;
But now beware, because my father's sons
Have sworn to spare no man of you, if once
A drop of blood is spilt! Come ye not forth
Until I bid you, if of any worth
Ye hold your lives; and meantime for the sake
Of what I had and have not, I will take
My due from mead and byre."

And therewithal
He let his helm down o'er his visage fall,
And turned back toward the tent. Back shrank again,
Cowed into sullen rage, the Bathstead men,
And armed but helpless there within the hall
Silent they sat, hearkening the raiders call
The cattle o'er the meads: in high-seat there
Sat Bodli, but his visage worn with care
Of the past days, was sad, but calm and soft,
As if he thought of gentle things, though oft
Fierce eyes would scowl upon his dreamy face
Unnoted of him; in that dreary place
He seemed like some dead king, condemned in hell
For his one sin among such men to dwell
As for their wickedness he hated most
Ere righteous ways and life and all were lost.

And in meantime, 'twixt silent trembling bower
And silent cursing hall, hour after hour
Did Gudrun pace with restless feet, and heart
Betwixt two nameless miseries torn apart,
Whence cold despair was being well fashioned now.
And Oswif sat apart with wrinkled brow,
Unnoted in that house of grief and wrong.
But midst their shame, from outside, laugh and song
Came loud and louder, mingled with the clank
Of mead-horns; the feast's clamour never sank
Till mid-day was well passed; then quieter
It grew without, and yet they still might hear
Lowing of neat and men's shouts. Then a voice
Cried from the slope-side:

"Bathstead men, rejoice
That ye no autumn-feast need hold this year,
For certes else should ye find victuals dear
And hard to come by! Oswif's sons, come out,
Unarmed and peaceable, and have no doubt
Of hurt from us!"

They stirred not for a space;
Then cried the voice: "Lives none within the place?
Are ye all dead of fear? Come out, I say,
Else o'er your roof the red cock crows to-day!"

Then Ospak, cursing, on the pavement cast
His shield and spear, and toward the doorway passed,
And in likewise the others one by one,
Till Bodli and Gudrun were left alone:

And then she said, "And thou—wilt thou not go?
Knowst thou the name of him who shames us so?"

"Yea, yea, I know it!" Bodli cried; "farewell!
Of me, too, shall there be a tale to tell:
I will go forth, but not without my sword."

He drew the thing he named with that last word,
And ran unto the door; against the wall
There stood the sons of Oswif, stout and tall,
Foaming, but helpless: in his saddle now
Sat Kiartan, unhelmed, his bright hair a-glow
With the May sun. His brethren stood around
Beside their horses, and a mighty sound
Came from the herd of neat that thronged the way
Beneath the hill-side; spears with pennons gay
Glittered about them in the sunlight fair,
For Kiartan's company was gathered there
Ready to set forth.
So there Bodli stood
One moment, thinking that the world was good,
Though not for him; then he cried out: "O thou,
Thou son of Olaf, come and meet me now,
For long have I been weary of the earth;
And now to me but one thing seems of worth
That I should win death of such hands as thine."

Then in the sunlight did the bright steel shine,
And Kiartan's brethren soon had ended all,
For Bodli ran forth; yet heard Kiartan call

Across the clash of arms: "Nay, point nor edge
His blood shall redden not; make ye a hedge
Of your strong shields and thrust him back again
Since he knows not that all his might is vain,
E'en to win death; live, foster-brother, yet,
And get despite of all, what thou mayst get
Of joy and honour."
Midway, Bodli stayed,
And in his hand he poised the heavy blade
As he would cast it from him, slowly then
Did he give back face foremost from the men,
Till in the doorway once again he stood.

Then Kiartan said: "Yea, cousin, it is good,
If thou must die by me, that thou shouldst bide
Some noble fight, some glorious reaping-tide,
Where each of each fair fame at least may gain—
God grant a little bliss ere that last pain!—
But hearken, thievish sons of a wise man!
Be taught, ye blustering fools, if yet ye can!
From Yule till now I gave you, a long day,
To pay the debt that needs was ye must pay;
Twice told I take it now, and leave behind
What shall seem shame indeed to most men's mind.
—This is my bridal gift, think well of it;
In your own fields it waxed, while ye did sit
Plotting across the meadhorns. Now take heed
That oft henceforth your manhood shall ye need
If ye would live in peace. Blow loud and clear,

O horns, for Refna waiteth for us there,
And merry shall we be to-night in hall
What things soever afterwards may fall !"

Still Bodli stood with drawn sword in the door,
While midst the clang of arms and horn's loud roar
He saw the herd move up the dusty road;
He saw how Kiartan for a while abode
Behind the rest, and stared at the grey stead
Whose roof so often had been o'er his head;
He saw him turn, and well might deem he sighed,
Then muttered he, "Ah, would God I had died
By thee to-day !" and sheathed his sword, and then
Was hustled by the sullen baffled men
Who shouldered past him back into the hall,
Who heeded him just as they did the wall
Past which they rubbed; but with the last of these
He went in, casting by all hope of peace.

But Refna looking from the Herdholt knoll
That evening, saw a dust-cloud upward roll
And move toward Herdholt, and her heart beat fast
When from the midst thereof bright spear-heads passed,
And then men's helms, and then the guarded herd;
And she bethought her of her mate's last word,
And bade the women in their best array,
And minstrels, stand on either side the way
To greet the new-comers, whose horns blew loud
Close by the garth now, while the beasts 'gan crowd

About the garth-gate; so, the gate past through,
Over the homefield toward the wall they drew,
Tended by gay-clad men-at-arms, who wore
About their helms fair flowers that Bathstead bore,
While of the beasts, sharp horn and curl-browed head,
And dewlapped neck were well begarlanded.
Then from the close loud joyful cries arose,
Tinkle of harps, sharp noise of fiddle-bows,
And all along the line there ran a shout:
Therewith old Olaf to the door came out,
And saw his sons swift from the cattle ride,
Till Kiartan leapt adown by Refna's side
And cast his arms about her, and 'gan cry:

"Now is the Queen's-Gift paid for fittingly;
For these are thine, e'en as my hand and sword.
To put from thee all care, and every word
That grieves thee, sweet. O love, but I am gay!
Sure a fair life beginneth from to-day!"

She gazed at him, and knew not why her heart
Scarce in that joyous scene might play its part—
Why it was not enough—these words of love,
His bright fair face her longing eyes above?
Yet with a loving cry she hid her face
Upon his breast.
Thereat did Olaf gaze
And muttered low: "A goodly price in sooth
For a girl's coif! but yet, for Kiartan's youth,

For his fair hope and glory, and increase
Of good deeds, and mine own old age of peace,
Not too much, not too much! Ah, woe is me
That I should live these latter days to see!'

Thorhalla tells of Kiartan's Comings and Goings.

WHAT should the next move in the strange
game be?
Kiartan rode through the country carelessly
With few behind him, but nought hitherto
The sons of Oswif durst against him do,
While he his hand withheld not utterly
From them; so doubtful did the days go by.

And Gudrun? Ah, the black spot in her hea
That rose when first she knew that one had part
In Kiartan's life, and ever greater grew,
When of his love toward this new love she knev
Now at the last, when over sure she felt
That she no longer in his memory dwelt,
O'erspread her life, till from the foiled desire
Cast back upon her heart, there sprang a fire
Of very hate: true was it, that at first
Bodli, herself, and all around she cursed
Rather than Kiartan—Well, what will you have
That was ere hope had sunk into his grave,

While yet some pleasure clung round Kiartan's name.
Then came the feast at Herdholt; then the shame
About the coif, and fear of shame again,
And many a tale told to make over plain
His love for Refna; then the evil hour,
When she within the darksome hall must cower
Among her trembling brethren: then, when she
Had looked at least a noble death to see,
Of one who loved her, Kiartan sent him back
A baffled man, as who all might did lack,
Yea, even the might to die; still, at each turn
Afresh this weary lesson must she learn;
With the wrong-doers hast thou taken part,
Live then, and die with them, for thy love's heart
Is now no more for thee! still everywhere
Did Kiartan's image meet her; the warm air
Of summer seemed but sent her from his hand,
The sea that beat the borders of the land
Still seemed to bear his fame unto her feet;
All summer sights and sounds, and odours sweet,
Were heavy with his memory: no least way
To 'scape from thought of him from day to day.
Withal, the sight of faces dull with hate
Of that same man, on every step did wait.
Familiar grew the muttering sullen voice
Of those who in no goodhap could rejoice,
Until the very thought and hope of strife,
The use of hate, must grow to be her life.
And shaped therefrom a dreadful longing rose,

That some fell end the weary way would close,
Unto herself she scarce durst whisper what.

Now on a day three of her brothers sat
Within the hall, and talked, and she stood by
Hearkening their eager speech most wearily.
"The gabbling crone Thorhalla has just been,"
Said Ospak; "And whom think you she has seen?"

"Nay, by thy scowl I know well," Thorolf said;
"'Twas Kiartan Olafson, upon my head."

"Well, Thorolf, thou grow'st wise—now, said the
crone,
That in her life she ne'er saw such an one
As Kiartan looked, a loving maiden's dream
Of a great king, she said, the man did seem.
'Well,' said I, 'and how long then will it last?'
'Ah,' said the crone, 'till after ye are passed;
Why, the whole country-side is ringing now
With this, that ye had best be wise and bow
Before him humbly, since most kind is he;
Kind,' says the crone, 'certes he was to me.'
'Well, well,' says I, 'but these are fools' words here.'
'Nay, let me speak,' she says, 'for he will fare
Unto the west to Knoll; this know I well,
Because to him therewith I needs must tell
Of one who owed me half a mark thereby.

Well, goody, says he, I shall pass anigh,
And I will fetch it for thee—lo, how kind.'"

"Now may God strike the gabbling idiot blind!"
Said Thorolf. "Nay," said Ospak, "not so wise
Thou growest now; rather, God keep her eyes!
Tidings she told me, saying he would bide
For just three days at Knoll, and thence will ride
Through Swinedale home, close here, nor like that he
Will ride by us with a great company,
Say two at most—good luck go with his pride,
Whereby so fair a chance doth us betide!—
Bodli shall lead or die."

Then Gudrun turned
Sick-hearted from them; how her longing burned
Within her heart! ah, if he died not now,
How might she tell whereto his hate would grow?
Yet a strange hope that longing shot across,
As she got thinking what would be the loss
If Bodli fell 'neath Kiartan's hand. That day,
Like years long told, past Gudrun wore away,
She knew not how; but when the next day came
She cried aloud, "The same, ah, still the same,
Shall every day be, now that he is dead!"
She started as she heard her voice, her head
Seemed filled with flame: she crawled unto her bower
And at her mirrored face hour after hour
She stared, and wondered what she really was,
The once-loved thing o'er which his lips would pass.

Her feet grew heavy at the end of day,
Her heart grew faint, upon her bed she lay
Moveless for many an hour, until the sun
Told her that now the last day was begun;
Then she arose as one might in a dream
To clothe herself, till a great cloud did seem
To draw away from her; as in bright hell,
Sunless but shadowless she saw full well
Her life that was and would be, now she knew
The deed unmasked that summer day should do.
And then she gnashed her teeth and tore her hair,
And beat her breast, nor lightened thus despair,
As over and over the sweet names she told
Whereby he called her in the days of old;
And then she thought of Refna's longing eyes,
And to her face a dreadful smile did rise
That died amidst its birth, as back again
Her thoughts went to the tender longing pain
She once had deemed a sweet fair day would end;
And therewith such an agony did rend
Her body and soul, that all things she forgat
Amidst of it; upon the bed she sat
Rigid and stark, and deemed she shrieked, yet made
No sound indeed; but slowly now did fade
All will away from her, until the sun
Risen higher, on her moveless body shone,
And as a smitten thing beneath its stroke
She shrank and started, and awhile awoke
To hear the tramp of men about the hall.

Then did a hand upon the panel fall;
And in her very soul she heard the ring
Of weapons pulled adown, and every thing,
Yea, even pain, was dead a little space.

At last she woke to see the haggard face
Of Bodli o'er her own: "I go," he said
"Would God that thou mayst hear of me as dead
Ere the sun sets to-day."
She passed her hand
Across her eyes, as he in arms did stand
Before her there, and stared but answered not,
As though indeed his face were clean forgot;
Yet her face quickened as his eyes she saw
So full of ruth yet nigher to her draw:
She shrank aback, but therewith suddenly
A thought smote through her, with an angry cry
She sprang up from the bed, naked and white,
Her gold hair glittering in the sunshine bright
That flooded all the place; his arm she caught
And stared into his eyes:
"What is thy thought?"
She said, "why goest thou with these murderous me
Ah! dost thou think thou yet mayst save him then
Ah! dost thou think that thou mayst still be kind
To every one, fool as thou art and blind,
Yet work thy wicked will to pleasure thee?"

Across her passion he began to see

That now she doubted him; he muttered low:
"The work of these my hands what man can know?
And yet at least the end shall be to-day."

She fell aback nor noted more, but lay
All huddled up upon the bed, her hair
O'er her white body scattered here and there,
And as he gazed on her he saw she wept,
And a wild passion o'er his heart there swept,
And twice he stretched his arms out, to embrace
His curse and his delight, twice turned his face
Unto the door that led unto the hall,
Then with a cry upon her did he fall
And, sobbing, strained her to his mail-clad breast,
And to her writhen lips his lips he pressed,
And moaned o'er her wet cheeks, and kissed her eyes
That knew him not; till in his heart 'gan rise,
Now at the last, a glory in his shame,
A pride to take the whole world's bitter blame;
And like a god he felt, though well he deemed
That to an end at last his dream was dreamed.
And she, she knew him not, her arms fell down
Away from him, her drawn mouth and set frown
Were not for him, she did not shrink from him,
She turned not round to curse or bless, when dim
She lay before his burning eyes once more,
Her long hair gilding the white bed clothes o'er,
As midst low restless moaning there she tossed.
Wildly he cried: "Oh, Gudrun, thou hast lost,

But look on me for I have never won!"
Then from the place he rushed, and with the sun
Burst into the dusk hall, a stream of light,
Neath his dark hair, his face so strange and white
That a dead man dragged up into the day
By wizard's arts he seemed to be, and they
Who waited armed there, and the last cup drank,
Looked each at each, and from his presence shrank.

For there were gathered now the murderous band,
Long to be cursed thereafter through the land,
Gudrun's five brethren, and three stout men more.
Then Ospak cried, "Soon shall our shame be o'er,
And thou and we shall be great men and famed
And Bathstead free; come now, since thou art named
Our leader, husband of Gudrun, lead forth!
For this day shall be called a day of worth,
By those that tell the story of our house."

Flushed were the men, and fierce and boisterous,
And Bodli trembled in his helpless rage
To be among them, but his sin's strong cage
Was strait and strong about him: with no word
He girt to him the rover's deadly sword,
And did his helm on: and so forth they wend
Through the bright morn to bring about the end.

The Slaying of Kiartan Olafson.

NOW Kiartan rode from Knoll betimes that day,
And goodman Thorkel brought him on the way
With twelve men more, and therewithal they ride
Fast from the west, but where the pass grew wide
And opened into Swinedale, Kiartan stayed
His company, and unto Thorkel said,
"Thanks have thou, goodman, for thy following;
Now get thee back, I fear not anything
'Twixt this and Herdholt."
"Well," the goodman said,
"Time enow is there yet to be waylaid
Ere thou art safe at home; let us ride on."

"Nay," Kiartan said, "the thing shall not be done,
All men of heart will say that heart I lack,
If I must have an army at my back
Where'er I go, for fear of Oswif's sons.
Fare thee well, goodman, get thee back at once!
And therewithal take this to comfort thee,
That Bodli yet is scarce mine enemy,
And holds aback those brethren; wot ye well,
Too strange a story would it be to tell,
If these should overcome my father's son,
Besides, without thee I ride not alone."

So back the goodman turned, misdoubting though,
In spite of all how yet the day would go,
And up the dale rode Kiartan; An the Black,
The man who erst the stolen sword brought back,
Was with him there, and one named Thorarin,
As slowly now the midway dale they win.

Now, as I find it written in my tale,
There went that morn a goodman of the dale,
About those bents his mares and foals to see,
His herdsman with him; these saw presently
Up from the east the men of Bathstead ride,
And take their stand along a streamlet's side
Deep sunken in a hollow, where the mouth
Of the strait pass turns somewhat to the south,
From out the dale; now, since the men they knew,
Much they misdoubted what these came to do;
But when they turned them from the sunken stream,
And saw the sun on other weapons gleam,
And three men armed come riding from the west;
And when they knew the tallest and the best
For Kiartan Olafson, therewith no more
They doubted aught.
Then said the herdsman: "Sore
The troubles are that on the country-side
Shall fall, if this same meeting shall betide;
He is a great chief; let us warn him then!"

"Yea, yea!" his master said, "and all such men

As fate leads unto death, that we may be
Twixt the two millstones ground right merrily,
And cursed as we cry out! thou art a fool,
Who needs must be the beaker and the stool
For great men's use; emptied of joys of life
For other's joy, then kicked by in the strife
When they are drunken; come, beside the way,
Let us lie close to see the merry play!
For such a swordsman as is Kiartan, we
Shall scarce behold on this side of the sea;
And heavy odds he hath against him too.
These are great men—good, let them hack and hew
Their noble bodies for our poor delight!"

So down the bent they slipped, and as they might
Lurked by the road, and thus they tell their tale:

Ere Kiartan reached the strait place of the dale,
High up upon the brook-bank Bodli lay,
So that his helm was just seen from the way;
Then Ospak went to him, and clear they heard
Across the road his rough and threatening word:
"What dost thou here? thou hast bethought thee then
To warn thy friend that here lurk all-armed men.
Thou knowest Gudrun's mind—or knowst it not,
But knowst that we within a trap have got
Thee and the cursed wretch, the proud Mire-blade,
The Thief, the King's-pimp, the white Herdholt maid.

Come, sister's husband, get thee lower down!"

The foam flew from the lips of the fierce clown
As thus he spake, but Bodli rose and said:
"Thinkst thou I armed because I was afraid
Of thee and thine this morn? If thou knewst well
Of love or honour, somewhat might I tell
Why I am here with thee—If will I have,
Kiartan, who was my friend, this day to save,
Bethink thee I might do it otherwise
Than e'en by showing what in ambush lies!
—How if I stood beside him?"
"Down with thee
And hold thy peace! or he will hear and see."

For so it was that Kiartan drew so near
That now the herd their clinking bits might hear,
Borne down upon the light wind: on he came,
Singing an old song made in Odin's fame,
Merry and careless on that sunny morn;
When suddenly out rang the Bathstead horn,
And sharply he drew rein, and looked around;
Then did the lurkers from the gully bound
And made on toward them, and down leapt all three,
And Kiartan glanced around, and speedily
Led toward a rock that was beside the way,
And there they shifted them to stand at bay.

Most noble then looked Kiartan, said the herd,

Nor ever saw I any less afeard;
Yet, when his watchful eye on Bodli fell,
A change came o'er him, that were hard to tell,
But that he dropped his hands at first, as one
Who thinks that all is over now and done;
Yet, says the neatherd, soon his brows did clear,
And from his strong hand whistled forth his spear,
And down fell Thorolf clattering on the road
He cried, 'Down goes the thief beneath his load,
One man struck off the tale! I have heard tell
Of such as dealt with more and came off well.'

Silence a space but for the mail rings, then
Over the dusty road on rushed those men;
And, says the herd, there saw I for a space
Confused gleam of swords about that place,
And from their clatter now and then did come
Sharp cry, or groan, or panting shout, as home
Went point or edge: but pale as death one stood,
With sheathed sword, looking on the clashing wood,
And that was Bodli Thorleikson. Then came
A lull a little space in that wild game.
The Bathstead men drew off, and still the three
Stood there scarce hurt as far as I could see;
But of the Bathstead men I deem some bled,
Though all stood firm; then Ospak cried and said;

"O Bodli, what thing wilt thou prophesy
For us, since like a seer thou standest by

And see'st thine house beat back? well then for thee
Will I be wise, foretelling what shall be—
A cold bed, and a shamed board, shalt thou have,
Yea, and ere many days a chased dog's grave,
If thou bringst home to-day a bloodless sword!"

But yet for all that answered he no word,
But stood as made of iron, though the breeze
Blew his long black hair round his cheek-pieces
And fanned his scarlet kirtle.
"Time we lose,"
Another cried, "if Bodli so shall choose,
Let him deal with us when this man is slain."
Then stoutly to the game they gat again
And played awhile, and now withal I saw
That rather did the sons of Oswif draw
Toward Thorarin and An, until the first,
From midst the knot of those onsetters burst,
And ran off west, followed by two stout men,
Not Oswif's sons; and An the Black fell then
Wounded to death, I deemed, but over him
Fell Gudlaug, Oswif's nephew, with a limb
Shorn off by Kiartan's sword: then once again
There came a short lull in the iron rain;
And then the four fell on him furiously
Awhile, then gave aback, and I could see
The noble Kiartan, with his mail-coat rent,
His shield hung low adown, his sword-blade bent
Panting for breath, but still without a wound.

While as a man by some strong spell fast bound,
Without a will for aught, did Bodli stand,
Nor once cast eyes on the waylayers' band,
Nor once glanced round at Kiartan, but stared still
Upon the green side of the grassy hill
Over against him, e'en as he did deem
It yet might yawn as in a dreadful dream,
And from its bowels give some marvel birth,
That in a ghostly wise should change the earth,
And make that day nought. But as there he stood
Ospak raised up his hand, all red with blood,
And smote him on the face, and cried;

"Go home,
Half-hearted traitor, e'en as thou hast come,
And bear my blood to Gudrun!"

Still no word
Came from his pale lips, and the rover's sword
Abode within the scabbard. Ospak said,
"O lover, art thou grown too full of dread
To look him in the face whom thou fearedst not
To cozen of the fair thing he had got?
O faint-heart thief of love, why drawest thou back,
When all the love thou erst so sore didst lack
With one stroke thou mayst win?"

He did not hear,
Or seemed to hear not; but now loud and clear
Kiartan cried out his name from that high place.
And at the first sound Bodli turned his face
This way and that, in puzzled hapless wise,

Till 'twixt the spears his eyes met Kiartan's eyes;
Then his mouth quivered, and he writhed aside,
And with his mail-clad hands his face did hide,
And trembled like one palsy-struck, while high
Over the doubtful field did Kiartan cry:

"Yea, they are right! be not so hardly moved,
O kinsman, foster-brother, friend beloved
Of the old days, friend well forgiven now!
Come nigher, come, that thou my face mayst know,
Then draw thy sword and thrust from off the earth
The fool that so hath spoilt thy days of mirth,
Win long lone days of love by Gudrun's side!
My life is spoilt, why longer do I bide
To vex thee, friend?—strike then for happy life!
I said thou mightst not gaze upon the strife
Far off; bethink thee then, who sits at home
And waits thee, Gudrun, my own love, and come,
Come, for the midday sun is over bright,
And I am wearying for the restful night!"

And now had Bodli dropped his hands adown,
And shown his face all drawn into a frown
Of doubt and shame; his hand was on his sword,
Even ere Kiartan spake that latest word;
Still trembling, now he drew it from its sheath,
And the bright sun ran down the fated death,
And e'en the sons of Oswif shuddered now,
As with wild eyes and heavy steps and slow,

He turned toward Kiartan; beat the heart in me
Till I might scarce breathe, for I looked to see
A dreadful game; the wind of that midday
Beat 'gainst the hill-sides; a hound far away
Barked by some homestead's door; the grey ewe's
bleat
Sounded nearby; but that dull sound of feet,
And the thin tinkling of the mail-coat rings
Drowned in my ears the sound of other things,
As less and less the space betwixt them grew;
I shut my eyes as one the end who knew,
But straight, perforce, I opened them again
Woe worth the while!

As one who looks in vain
For help, looked Kiartan round; then raised his
shield,
And poised his sword as though he ne'er would yield
E'en when the earth was sinking; yet a while,
And o'er his face there came a quivering smile,
As into Bodli's dreadful face he gazed;
Then my heart sank within me, as all dazed,
I saw the flash of swords that never met,
And heard how Kiartan cried;

"Ah, better yet
For me to die than live on even so!
Alas! friend, do the deed that thou must do!
Oh, lonely death!—farewell, farewell, farewell!"

And clattering on the road his weapons fell,

And almost ere they touched the bloody dust,
Into his shieldless side the sword was thrust,
And I, who could not turn my eyes away,
Beheld him fall, and shrieked as there I lay,
And yet none noted me; but Bodli flung
Himself upon the earth, and o'er him hung,
Then raised his head, and laid it on his knee,
And cried:

"Alas! what have I done to thee?
Was it for this deed, then, that I was born?
Was this the end I looked for on this morn?
I said, To-day I die, to-day I die,
And folk will say, an ill deed, certainly,
He did, but living had small joy of it,
And quickly from him did his weak life flit—
Where was thy noble sword I looked to take
Here in my breast, and die for Gudrun's sake,
And for thy sake—O friend, am I forgot?
Speak yet a word!"

But Kiartan answered not,
And Bodli said, "Wilt thou not then forgive?
Think of the days I yet may have to live
Of hard life!"

Therewith Kiartan oped his eyes,
And strove to turn about as if to rise,
And could not, but gazed hard on Bodli's face,
And gasped out, as his eyes began to glaze:

"Farewell, thou joyous life beneath the sun,

Thou foolish wasted gift—farewell, Gudrun!"
And then on Bodli's breast back fell his head,
He strove to take his hand, and he was dead.

Then was there silence a long while, well-nigh
We heard each other breathe, till quietly
At last the slayer from the slain arose,
And took his sword, and sheathed it, and to those
Four sons of Oswif, e'en as one he spake
Who had good right the rule o'er them to take:

"Here have we laid to earth a mighty one,
And therein no great deed, forsooth, have done,
Since his great heart o'ercame him, not my sword;
And what hereafter may be our reward
For this, I know not: he that lieth here
By many a man in life was held right dear,
As well as by the man who was his friend,
And brought his life and love to bitter end;
And since I am the leader of this band
Of man-slayers, do after my command.
Go ye to Bathstead, name me everywhere
The slayer of Kiartan Olafson, send here
Folk who shall bear the body to our stead;
And then let each man of you hide his head,
For ye shall find it hard from this ill day
To keep your lives: here, meanwhile will I stay,
Nor think myself yet utterly alone."

Then home turned Oswif's sons, and they being gone,
We slunk away, and looking from the hill
We saw how Bodli Thorleikson stood still
In that same place, nor yet had faced the slain.
And so we gat unto our place again.

So told the herd, time long agone, the tale
Of that sad fight within the grey-sloped vale.

Kiartan brought dead to Bathstead.

MEN say that those who went the corpse to bring
To Bathstead thence, found Bodli muttering
Over the white face turned up to the sky,
Nor did he heed them as they drew anigh,
Therefore they stood by him, and heard him say:

"Perchance it is that thou art far away
From us already; caring nought at all
For what in after days to us may fall—
—O piteous, piteous!—yet perchance it is
That thou, though entering on thy life of bliss,
The meed of thy great heart, yet art anear,
And somewhat of my feeble voice canst hear;
Then scarce for pardon will I pray thee, friend,
Since thus our love is brought unto no end,
But rather now, indeed, begins anew;
Yet since a long time past nought good or true

My lips might utter, let me speak to thee,
If so it really is that thou art free,
At peace and happy past the golden gate;
That time is dead for thee, and thou mayst wait
A thousand years for her and deem it nought.
O dead friend, in my heart there springs a thought
That, since with thy last breath thou spakst her name,
And since thou knowest now how longing came
Into my soul, thou wilt forgive me yet
That time of times, when in my heart first met
Anger against thee, with the sweet sweet love
Wherewith my old dull life of habit strove
So weakly and so vainly—didst thou quite
Know all the value of that dear delight
As I did? Kiartan, she is changed to thee;
Yea, and since hope is dead changed too to me,
What shall we do, if, each of each forgiven,
We three shall meet at last in that fair heaven
The new faith tells of? Thee and God I pray
Impute it not for sin to me to-day,
If no thought I can shape thereof but this:
O friend, O friend, when thee I meet in bliss,
Wilt thou not give my love Gudrun to me,
Since now indeed thine eyes made clear can see
That I of all the world must love her most?"

Then his voice sank so that his words were lost
A little while; then once again he spake,
As one who from a lovesome dream doth wake:

"Alas! I speak of heaven who am in hell!
I speak of change of days, who know full well
How hopeless now is change from misery:
I speak of time destroyed, when unto me
Shall the world's minutes be as lapse of years;
I speak of love who know how my life bears
The bitter hate which I must face to-day—
I speak of thee, and know thee passed away,
Ne'er to come back to help or pity me."

Therewith he looked up, and those folk did see,
And rose up to his feet, and with strange eyes
That seemed to see nought, slunk in shamefast wise,
Silent, behind them, as the corpse they laid
Upon the bier; then, all things being arrayed,
Back unto Bathstead did they wend once more,
As mournful as though dead with them they bore
The heart of Iceland; and yet folk must gaze
With awe and pity upon Bodli's face,
And deem they never might such eyes forget.
But when they reached the stead, anigh sunset,
There in the porch a tall black figure stood,
Whose stern pale face, 'neath its o'erhanging hood,
In the porch shadow was all cold and grey,
Though on her feet the dying sunlight lay.
They trembled then at what might come to pass,
For that grey face the face of Gudrun was,
And they had heard her raving through the day
As through the hall they passed; then made they stay

A few yards from the threshold, and in dread
Waited what next should follow; but she said,
In a low voice and hoarse:

"Nay, enter here,
Without, this eve is too much change and stir,
And rest is good,—is good, if one might win
A moment's rest; and now none is within
The hall but Oswif: not much will he speak,
And as for me—behold, I am grown weak!
I cannot vex him much."

She stepped aside,
And the dark shade her raiment black did hide
As they passed through into the dusky hall,
Afraid to see her face, and last of all
Went Bodli, clashing through the porch, but he
Stayed in the midst, and turned round silently,
And sought her face and said:

"Thy will is done.
Is it enough? Art thou enough alone
As I am?"

Never any word she spake.
No hate was in her face now: "For thy sake
I did it, Gudrun. Speak one word to me
Before my bitter shame and misery
Crushes my heart to death."

She reached a hand
Out toward the place where trembling he did stand,
But touched him not, and never did he know

If she had mind some pity then to show
Unto him, or if rather more apart
She fain had thrust him from her raging heart,
For now those men came tramping from the hall,
And Bodli shrank aback unto the wall
To let them pass, and when the last was gone,
In the dim twilight there he stood alone,
Nor durst he follow her, but listened there,
Half dead, and but his breathing might he hear,
And the faint noises of the gathering night.
He stood so long that the moon cast her light
In through the porch, and still no sound he heard
But the faint clink of mail-rings as he stirred.
"Ah, she is dead of grief, or else would she
Have come to say some little word to me,
Since I so love her, love her!"

With a wail
He cried these words, and in the moonlight pale,
Clashing he turned: but e'en therewith a shriek
From out the dead hush of the hall did break,
And then came footsteps hurrying to the porch,
And the red flare of a new-litten torch,
And smit by nameless horror and affright
He fled away into the moonlit night.

What Folk did at Herdholt after the Slaying.

NOW in the hall next morn did Oswif bide
The while his messengers went far and wide
Asking for help; and all in hiding lay
Whose hapless hands had brought about that day,
Save Bodli; but for him, when back he came
That morn, affrighted, Oswif called his name,
Beholding him so worn and changed, and said:

"Stout art thou, kinsman, not to hide thine head!
Yet think that Olaf is a mighty man,
And though thy coming life look ill and wan—
Good reason why—Yet will I ask of thee
The staff of mine old age at least to be,
And save thy life therefor."
Then Bodli smiled
A ghastly smile: "Nay, I am not beguiled
To hope for speedy death; is it not told
How that Cain lived till he was very old?"

Therewith he sank adown into a seat
And hid his face. But sound of hurrying feet
Was in the porch withal; and presently
Came one who said:
"Oswif, all hail to thee!
From Holyfell I come with tidings true,
That little will the wily Snorri do

To help us herein; for he saith the deed
Is most ill done, and that thy sons shall need
More help than they shall get within the land;
Yet saith withal, he will not hold his hand
From buying peace, if that may serve thy turn."

"Well, well," said Oswif, "scarce now first I learn
That Snorri bides his time, and will not run
His neck into a noose for any one.
Go, get thee food, good fellow. Whence com'st thou
Who followest, thy face is long enow?"

"The bearer of a message back I am
From Whiteriver, where Audun Festargram
Has well-nigh done his lading, and, saith he,
That so it is he feareth the deep sea
But little, and the devil nought at all;
But he is liefer at hell's gate to call
With better men than are thy sons, he saith."

"Good," Oswif said, "that little he fears death
My sight clears, and I see his black bows strike
The hidden skerry. But thou next; belike
Thou hast ill tidings too: what saith my friend,
The son of Hauskuld? what shall be the end?"

"Oswif," the man said, "be not wroth with me
If unto Herdholt nowise openly
I went last night; I fared with hidden head

E'en as a man who drifts from stead to stead
When things go ill: so shelter there I gat,
And mid the house-carles long enow I sat
To note men's bearing. Olaf—an old man
He looks now truly—sat all worn and wan
Within the high-seat, and I deemed of him
That he had wept, from his red eyes and dim,
That scarce looked dry as yet; but down the board
Sat Thorgerd, and I saw a naked sword
Gleam from her mantle; round her sat her sons,
And unto Haldor did she whisper once
And looked toward Olaf; Haldor from its sheath
Half drew his sword, and then below his breath
Spake somewhat. Now looked Olaf round the hall,
But when his eyes on Kiartan's place did fall
His mouth twitched, though his eyes gazed steadily;
He set his hand unto a beaker nigh
And drank and cried out:

'Drink now all of you
Unto the best man Iceland ever knew!
Son, I am weary that thou hast not come
With gleesome tales this eve unto my home;
Yet well thou farest surely amid those
Who are the noblest there, and not so close
They sit, but there is room for thee beside;
Sure, too, with them this eve is merry tide
That thou art come amongst them—would that I
O son, O son, were of that company!'

"With outstretched hand and fixed eyes did he stare,
As though none other in the hall there were
But him he named; the while mid shout and clank
All folk unto the man departed drank,
And midst the noise, withal, I saw no few,
Who from their sheaths the glittering weapons drew,
And through the talk of Kiartan's deeds I heard,
Not lowly spoken, many a threatening word;
While with the tumult of the clattering place
So gathered white-hot rage in Thorgerd's face,
That long it held her silent: then I saw
A black form from the women's chamber draw
White-faced, white-handed; ever did she gaze
Upon the hall-door with an anxious face,
And once or twice as the stout door-planks shook
Beneath the wind's stroke, a half-hopeful look
Came o'er her face, that faded presently
In anguish, as she looked some face to see
Come from the night, and then remembered all;
And therewith did great ruth upon me fall,
For this was Refna; and most quietly
She passed to Olaf's side, and with a sigh
Sat down beside him there; now and again
An eager look lit up her patient pain
As from the home-men Kiartan's name came loud,
And then once more her heavy head she bowed,
And strove to weep and might not. In a while
She raised her eyes, and met grey Thorgerd's smile

Scornful and fierce, who therewithal rose up
And laid her hand upon a silver cup,
And drew from out her cloak a jewelled sword,
And cast it ringing on the oaken board,
And o'er the hall's noise high her clear voice shrilled;

"'If the old gods by Christ and mass are killed,
Or driven away, yet am I left behind,
Daughter of Egil, and with such a mind
As Egil had; wherefore if Asa Thor
Has never lived, and there are men no more
Within the land, yet by this king's gift here,
And by this cup Thor owned once, do I swear
That the false foster-brother shall be slain
Before three summers have come round again,
If but my hand must bring him to his end.'

"Therewith a stern shout did her tall sons send
Across the hall, and mighty din arose
Among the home-men. Refna shrank all close
To Olaf's side; but he at first said nought,
Until the cries and clash of weapons brought
Across his dream some image of past days;
And, turning, upon Refna did he gaze,
And on her soft hair laid his hand, and then
Faced round upon the drink-flushed clamorous men,
And in a mighty voice cried out and said:
'Forbear, ye brawlers! now is Kiartan dead,
Nor shall I live long. Will it bring him back

To let loose on the country war and wrack,
And slay the man I love next after him?
Leave me in peace at least! mine eyes wax dim,
And little pleasure henceforth shall I have,
Until my head hath rest within the grave.'

"Then did he rise and stretch across the board,
And took into his hand the noble sword,
And said, 'In good will wert thou given, O blade,
But not to save my son's heart wert thou made.
Help no man henceforth! harm no man henceforth!
Thou foolish glittering toy of little worth!'

"Therewith he brake the sword across his knee,
And cast it down; and then I minded me
How the dead man there bore not that fair blade
When unto grass of Swinedale he was laid.
But Olaf looked so great a man, that none
Durst say a word against him. 'Gone is gone,'
He said, 'nor yet on Bodli shall ye fall.
When all is ready Kiartan's voice shall call
For him he loved; but if it must be so,
Then unto Oswif's base sons shall ye show
That him they did to death left friends behind;
For this thing ever shall ye bear in mind,
That through their vile plots did all come to pass,
And Bodli but the sword they fought with was.'

"And therewithal he sat down wearily,
And once again belike saw nought anigh.

"Well, Oswif, little more there happed that eve,
And I at dawn to-day their stead did leave,
To tell thee how things went."
Now Bodli heard
The man speak, and some heart in him was stirred
When of the woman's oath was told, but when
The tale was ended, his head sank again
With a low moan; but Oswif said:
"Yea, true
Did my heart tell me, when I thought I knew
The nobleness of Olaf Hauskuldson.
What shall be done now?"
As he spake came one
Panting and flushed into the hall, and cried:
"Get to your arms in haste; Herdholt doth ride
Unto our stead in goodly company!"
Then was there tumult as was like to be,
And round the silent face of the dead man,
Hither and thither, half-armed tremblers ran
With poor hearts; but old Oswif to the door
Went forth unarmed, and Bodli scarce moved more
Than his dead foster-brother. Soon withal
Did quiet on the troubled homestead fall,
For there was nought come but a peaceful train
To bring back Kiartan to his home again;
And there upon the green slope did they bide,
Whence Kiartan on that other morn had cried
His scorn aloud; wherefrom were six men sent,
Who, entering now the thronged hall, slowly went,

Looking around them, toward the bier; but as
They drew anear it, from the bower did pass
A black-clad figure, and they stood aghast,
For it was Gudrun, and wild eyes she cast
On this and that man, as if questioning
Mutely the meaning of some dreadful thing
She knew was doing there: her black gown's hem
She caught up wildly as she gazed at them,
Then shuddering cast it down, and seemed to seek
The face of Oswif; then as if to shriek
She raised her head, and clenched her hands, but nought
Of sound from out her parched lips was there brought,
Till at her breast she clutched, and rent adown
With trembling hands the bosom of her gown,
And cried out, panting as for lack of air;

"Alas, what do ye? have ye come to bear
My love a second time from me, O men?
Do ye not know he is come back again
After a long time? Ah, but evil heart
Must be in you such love as ours to part!"

Then, crying out, upon the corpse she fell,
And men's hearts failed them for pure ruth, and well
They deemed it, might she never rise again;
But strong are many hearts to bear all pain
And live, and hers was even such an one.
Softly they bore her back amidst her swoon;

And then, while even men must weep, once more
Did Kiartan pass the threshold of the door,
That once had been the gate of Paradise
Unto his longing heart. But in nowise
Did Bodli move amidst all this, until
Slow wound the Herdholt men around the hill;
Then stealthily his white face did he raise,
And turned about unto the empty place
Where erst the bier had stood; then he arose,
And looked into the faces of all those
Who stood around, as asking what betid,
What dreadful thing the quivering silence hid;
And then he staggered back unto the wall,
And such a storm of grief on him did fall,
With sobs, and tears, and inarticulate cries,
That men for shame must turn away their eyes,
Nor seem to see a great man fallen so low.

With such wild songs home to the stead came now
The last load of that bitter harvesting,
That from the seed of lust and lies did spring.

Gudrun's deeming of the Men who loved her.

THUS have I striven to show the troublous life
Of these dead folk, e'en as if mid their strife
I dwelt myself; but now is Kiartan slain;
Bodli's blank yearning, Gudrun's wearying pain,

Shall change but little now unto the end;
And midst a many thoughts home must I wend,
And in the ancient days abide no more.
Yet, when the shipman draweth nigh the shore,
And slacks the sheet and lets adown the sail,
Scarce suddenly therewith all way doth fail
The sea-clasped keel. So with this history
It fareth now; have patience then with me
A moment yet, ere all the tale is told.

While Olaf Peacock lived, his sons did hold
Their hands from Bodli; Oswif's sons must pay
With gold and outlawry for that ill day,
And nothing else there happened to them worse
Than o'er the sea to bear all people's curse,
Nor know men aught more of their history.
Three winters afterward did Olaf die,
Full both of years and honour; then was not
Thorgerd's fierce oath amidst her sons forgot;
The golden ring, whose end old Guest foresaw,
Worn through the weary years with many a flaw,
Now smitten, fell asunder: Bodli died
Manlike amidst his foes, with none beside
To sorrow o'er him, scarcely loth maybe
The end of his warped life at last to see.

Turn back a while; of her I have to tell,
Whose sorrow on my heart the more doth dwell,
That nought she did to earn it, as I deem—

—Unto the Ridge, where on the willowy stream
Her father's stead looks down, did Refna go,
That, if it might be, she some rest might know
Within the fair vale where she wandered, when
The bearded faces of the weaponed men
Were wonders to her child's eyes, far away
The wild thoughts of their hearts; her little day
Of hope and joy gone by, there yet awhile
She wandered once again; nor her faint smile
Would she withhold, when pitying eyes did gaze
On the deep sorrow of her lovely face;
For she belike felt strong, and still might deem
That life, all turned into a longing dream,
Would long abide with her—happier she was,
But little time over her head did pass,
Before all smiles from off her face did fade,
And in the grave her yearning heart was laid,
No more now to be rent 'twixt hope and fear,
No more to sicken with the dull despair.

Yet is she left to tell of, some might call,
The very cause the very curse of all;
And yet not I—for after Bodli's death
Too dreadful grew the dale, my story saith,
For Gudrun longer at her house to dwell,
Wherefore with Snorri, lord of Holyfell,
Did she change steads. There dwelt she a long space,
And true it is, that in her noble face
Men deemed but little signs of woe they saw;

And still she lived on long, and in great awe
And honour was she held, nor unfulfilled
Was the last thing that Guest deemed fate had willed
Should fall on her: when Bodli's sons were men
And many things had happed, she wed again,
And though her days of keen joys might be bare
Yet little did they bring of added care
As on and on they wore from that old time
When she was set amidst mad love and crime.

Yet went this husband's end no otherwise
Than Guest foresaw: at last with dreamy eyes
And weary heart from his grave too she turned.
Across the waste of life on one hand burned
The unforgotten sore regretted days
Long left behind; and o'er the stony ways
Her feet must pass yet, the grey cloud of death
Rolled doubtful, drawing nigher. The tale saith
That she lived long years afterwards, and strove,
E'en as she might, to win a little love
From God now, and with bitter yearning prayer
Through these slow-footed lonely days to wear.
And men say, as to all the ways of earth
Her soul grew blind, and other hopes had birth
Within her, that her bodily sight failed too,
And now no more the dark from day she knew.

This one more picture gives the ancient book
On which I pray you for a while to look,

If for your tears ye may. For it doth tell
That on a day she sat at Holyfell
Within the bower, another Bodli there
Beside her, son of him who wrought her care;
A travelled man and mighty, gay of weed,
Doer belike of many a desperate deed
Within the huge wall of the Grecian king.
A summer eve it was, and everything
Was calm and fair, the tinkling bells did sound
From the fair chapel on the higher ground
Of the holy hill, the murmur of the sea
Came on the fitful south-west soothingly;
The house-carles sang as homeward now they went
From out the home-field, and the hay's sweet scent
Floated around, and when the sun had died
An hour agone now, Bodli stirred and sighed;
Perchance too clearly felt he life slip by
Amid those pensive things, and certainly
He too was passed his youth.

"Mother," he said,
"Awhile agone it came into my head
To ask thee somewhat; thou hast loved me well,
And this perchance is no great thing to tell
To one who loves thee."

With her sightless eyes
Turned on him did she smile in loving wise,
But answered nought; then he went on, and said:
"Which of the men thou knewest—who are dead
Long ago, mother,—didst thou love the best?"

Then her thin hands each upon each she pressed,
And her face quivered, as some memory
Were hard upon her:
"Ah, son! years go by.
When we are young this year we call the worst
That we can know; this bitter day is cursed,
And no more such our hearts can bear we say.
But yet as time from us falls fast away
There comes a day, son, when all this is fair
And sweet, to what, still living, we must bear—
Bettered is bale by bale that follows it,
The saw saith."
Silent both awhile did sit
Until she spake again: "Easy to tell
About them, son, my memory serves me well:
A great chief Thorkel was, bounteous and wise,
And ill hap seemed his death in all men's eyes.
Bodli thy sire was mighty of his hands,
Scarce better dwelt in all the northern lands;
Thou wouldst have loved him well. My husband Thord
Was a great man; wise at the council-board,
Well learned in law—for Thorwald, he indeed,
A rash weak heart, like to a stinging weed
Must be pulled up—ah, that was long ago!"
Then Bodli smiled, "Thou wouldst not have me know
Thy thought, O mother—these things know I well
Old folk about these men e'en such tales tell."

She said, "Alas, O son, thou askst of love?

Long folly lasteth; still that word doth move
My old worn heart—hearken one little word,
Then ask no more; ill is it to be stirred
To vain repining for the vanished days."

She turned, until her sightless eyes did gaze
As though the wall, the hills, must melt away,
And show her Herdholt in the twilight grey;
She cried, with tremulous voice, and eyes grown wet
For the last time, whate'er should happen yet,
With hands stretched out for all that she had lost:

"I did the worst to him I loved the most."

THEY too, those old men, well might sit and gaze
Upon the images of bygone days,
And wonder mid their soft self-pity, why
Mid such wild struggles had their lives gone by,
Since neither love nor joy, nor even pain,
Should last for ever; yet their strife so vain
While still they strove, so sore regretted now,
The heavy grief that once their heads did bow,
Had wrought so much for them, that they might sit
Amid some pleasure at the thought of it;
At least not quite consumed by sordid fear,
That now at last the end was come anear;
At least not hardened quite so much, but they
Might hear of love and longing worn away
Twixt birth and death of others, wondering
Belike, amid their pity what strange thing
Made the mere truth of what poor souls did bear
—In vain or not in vain—so sweet to hear,
So healing to the tangled woes of earth,
At least for a short while.

But little mirth
The grey eve and the strong unfailing wind
Might ask of them that tide; and yet behind
That mask of pensive eyes, so unbeguiled
By ancient folly any more, what wild
Strange flickering hopes ineffable might lie,
As swift that latter end of eve slipped by!

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